

THE AIRSHIP BOYS

In The Barren Lands

H.L. SAYLER



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THE ARCTIC SWELL BEGAN TO ROLL THE
LITTLE STEAMER.

The Airship Boys In The Barren Lands

or, The Secret of the White Eskimos

BY

H. L. SAYLER



Illustrated by S. H. Riesenberg

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THE AIRSHIP BOYS IN THE BARREN LANDS

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*“The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,
And in strange valleys greet strange deaths
alone;*

*The grim, intrepid ones who would unravel
The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone.”*

—Service

The Airship Boys In the Barren Lands

OR,

The Secret of the White Eskimos

CHAPTER I

THE TOP O' THE WORLD.

"It 's a whaler, all right."

Corporal Strakeleys announced this after a long examination of the icebound, northern horizon.

"Certainly a whaler," exclaimed his companion, Private Ebeling. "But the craft behind her?"

"Looks like a steamer—an' a good un."

"Ever hear of a steamer pullin' in at Herschel Island?"

"Never," answered Corporal Strakeleys, "But this un is. An' she 's in tow."

"That accounts for it," added Ebeling, with a smile. "She 's comin' because she can't help it. She 's disabled. Let 's get a glass."

A moment later, Corporal Strakeleys and Private Ebeling, both of the Northwest Canadian Mounted Police, were hurrying down the sterile

heights of Herschel Island toward headquarters on Pauline Cove. It was just noon when the two policemen, shooting surf ducks, made out the smoke on the horizon. An hour later, a group of strange men had hastened with them to the high ground. All took turns in bringing a glass to bear upon the approaching vessels.

The curious watchers now included Hayward, the "Company" factor; Engellard, his storekeeper, and Gompers, the Whale Company representative. An Indian, a quarter-breed Loucheux, stood apart, also apparently interested.

"Looks like a passenger steamer," suggested Gompers. "Only she can't be—up here."

"Well," said Factor Hayward, after a second long look, "any way, the craft at 's abringin' of her in is Captain Lem Webster's *Nvota*."

There was another round of inspection. All agreed with the factor. The *Nvota*, which had left the island twenty-seven days before in quest of whale oil and bone, was now entering port again, with a vessel the like of which had never before been seen in those Arctic seas.

Curiosity increased. What could it mean? Opinions were various.

"It 's American, anyway," volunteered the

English Corporal, Strakeleys. "I make out her colors."

One suggested that the vessel in tow might be a "new fangled whaler" out of coal; another that it was perhaps a naval transport on special service.

"I hope," added young Ebeling, a smile showing on his keen English face, "that it 's an excursion boat full of good looking girls. Might pull off a hop."

Hayward, the factor, grunted.

"Might as well hope it 's some one bringin' us a cargo o' Yorkshire puddin' and roast beef. If it 's a trader, lessen she kin do somethin' I can't, she won't make enough fur out o' these parts to pay for engine oil."

"What do *you* think, Leon?" exclaimed Ebeling, his well-modulated English voice in marked contrast to the words of the grizzled factor.

The Indian shrugged his shoulders; but, instead of a savage grunt, he made answer in excellent English. There was a French grace to the movement of his athletic frame, and something of Ebeling's mannerism in his words.

"The world thinks this land nothing but ice. Some one in that vessel knows better. Some

American has begun to read the secret of the wilderness."

Gompers, the Whale Company agent, shot at the Indian a look of disgust.

"They have, eh? Well, I 'll soon put 'em right. When the whales is gone, that 'll be the end o' Herschel Island."

"Or the beginning," interrupted Ebeling, the English policeman.

"Beginnin' o' what?" asked Gompers, with a growl.

Ebeling turned and swept his arm toward the mainland horizon on the south.

"The beginning of that," he answered, with another smile. "The riches of that wilderness are not even dreamed of yet. All the furs of those woods," he added, playfully patting the Whale Company agent on the shoulder, "and all the whale oil in these seas," he continued, "are not that," and he snapped his slender, aristocratic fingers, "compared to what the world is going to take out of this northland when men become wise."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Engellard, the hitherto silent trader and storekeeper. "It 's bad enough up here, God knows. But down there," and he too pointed toward the gray green of the distant

spruce, "it 's naught but ten months o' pemmi-can, with Sunday sow belly, and two months o' mosquitoes, with slippery venison. As fur takin' anything out, the world kin take *me* out any minute it likes."

"And you 'd cast up again when the ice went out the next season," remarked Ebeling, his smile broadening.

"Do you reckon I 'll come to this island again if I ever escape?" broke in Gompers, with a mocking laugh."

"You might do worse," answered Ebeling. "Leon left the wilderness once. He came back—from choice."

"He 's Injun," snapped Gompers. "He don't know no better."

"Or," exclaimed Ebeling, a little soberer, "being part Indian, he may—"

"'May' what?" asked Gompers in derision.

"May know more than the white man."

Both Engellard and Gompers chuckled sarcastically. Leon, the Indian, only shrugged his shoulders again. Then, with a peculiar smile, he turned and made his way down the heights.

"Any man, Injun ur white, born north o' the Athabasca," went on Engellard, "who 's been to Paris and London like that breed has, an' who

without no compulsion, ups and trails back to a land o' nothin' but space—why—well, I reckon he needs watchin'."

"Perhaps," chuckled Ebeling, his smile returning. "Would n't wonder but what you 're right. I am."

"You 're what?" sneered Engellard.

"Watching Leon," answered Ebeling suddenly and sharply. "What 's more, I came all the way from London to do it."

Perhaps a half hour passed in which the irritable speculators sat and smoked and watched the larger growing vessels. Then, hastening upwards from the bay below, Ebeling made out the figure of Leon, the breed, in company with a white man.

"Well," Ebeling exclaimed, at once, in disgust, "we 're certainly a bally pack o' duffers. Here comes Leon with Captain Campbell. That 's the craft Campbell 's been waitin' a year for. He said it might be here."

"He did that," added Factor Hayward, "an' he also said he did n't know nothin' about her—— who she was, whar she was goin', nur what she was arter. That the steamer yur been tellin' about, Captain?" he called in a more conciliatory

tone, addressing the new arrival, and indicating the strange vessel.

"I reckon she be," responded Captain Campbell, bringing his glasses into play.

"Who is she?" asked Gompers eagerly.

"Sarch me," responded the captain. "But I allow she 's arter my coal an' I guess I 'm goin' to git away, fur which many thanks."

"An' ye don't know her business?" asked Factor Hayward.

"Ain't no idee," smiled the skipper in reply. "Ef yer all cur'us, come with me. I 'm goin' to meet her an' find out, ef I kin."

Herschel Island, whereon this remarkable collection of men had gathered from the corners of the world, lies some miles at sea, in the icy blue waters of the Arctic Ocean off the mouth of the great McKenzie, longest and most wonderful of American rivers. Embraced by the turbid, mile-wide volume of water that has swept northward over twenty-four hundred miles of almost trackless wilderness, this most northern bit of the world inhabited by civilized man, rises bleak and bare, twenty-five miles round about and a thousand feet in length.

On the rocky slopes back of Pauline Cove, there is a scattered group of human habitations; but

of these, other than the headquarters of the mounted police, two only are occupied by white men.

Above one, a wide cabin made stout against the long months of polar blasts, flies always the red union jack of England. On its faded crimson, stands out the 250-year-old seal of the endless woods—the magic “H. B.” of the Hudson Bay Company. Here, on the fringe of the world—beyond which only Arctic waters reach—the grim factor of the “Company” has brought his wares to the Kogmollyc, the Nunatalmute and the Louch-eux—natives to whom this top o’ the world is home.

Near by is a heavy cabin, on which, if there were use for signs on that sterile rock, one might read “Office of the North Pacific Whaling Company.” For here, to Pauline Cove, when failure marks his short six weeks’ cruise, or sudden ice blocks escape to the distant Pacific, the Beaufort sea whaler hastens to find winter quarters.

Locked in the ice of the cove, these wintering whalers bring to Herschel Island its only activity. From each roofed-over deck, men come and go; driftwood is gathered from the ice-locked McKenzie shores, hunters wander far to the south for moose, cariboo and musk ox, and when the six

weeks of sunless night falls on the polar world, each vessel becomes a house in the "Whale City" of the Arctic.

Perhaps, for these alone, the winter igloo and the summer tupik of the Eskimo fringe the cove and crowd about the white men's cabins. As hunters and fishermen, the Eskimo becomes the whaler's servant.

At last, a tremor runs through the Arctic world in July, and then, as if by magic, the "city" disappears. The whalers are off for booty in the icebound waters of the Arctic Beaufort sea, the last refuge of the world hunted whale. When nature relents, the life goes out of Herschel Island.

In a recent year, the ice went out of "Whale City" Bay on the sixth of July. Two days later, of the thirteen whalers who had passed the long winter behind the sheltering island, not one was in sight. Yet one vessel that had lain tight in the ice for nearly a year, still held her berth. Low in the water, her hull gray from the wash of the sea, the steam collier *Yosemite* still swung at her anchor. The Eskimos and the Indians could not understand. Nor did the police, traders and Whale Company representative ashore know much more.

Often had Captain Campbell exchanged visits

with those on the island and with the whalers, in the monotonous days of the bleak winter, but never did he volunteer more than this in explanation:

“A steamer ’ll put in here this summer fur my coal. I don’t know where she ’s goin’, an’ it ’s none o’ my business. When she comes an’ takes what I ’ve got, I ’ll be off fur San Francisco.”

In this part of the world, each man’s business is his own. Like the Indian, the isolated trapper and trader asks little, and volunteers less.

Early in March, two weeks after the dark world saw the first glow of the returning sun, “Whale City” had a sensation. Out of the silent south, speeding by dog sledge over the frozen McKenzie, came a man. In the settlement, he asked only for Captain Campbell and the *Yosemite*. To the mounted police, he later explained that he was Donald McCoun, from Fort Norman, six hundred miles inland—courier with a message for Captain Campbell. Two weeks later, it was known that McCoun was to strike the trail to Dawson. In a few days, he was gone. He carried many messages to the distant Yukon, but left behind no account of his mission.

“It concerns the steamer that ’s comin’,” was Captain Campbell’s only explanation to the whal-

ers and those in the settlement. "Mebbe she won't come now, arter all."

One of those who watched the Scotch-Canadian Donald McCoun start on his long journey through the dark woods, the wide tundra wastes and finally over the terrifying slopes of the distant Rockies, was Captain Lem Webster, of the steam whaler *Nvota*, of Sitka. And Captain Webster, first to break out of the ice on the sixth of July, was also the first of those who wintered in "Whale City," to learn that Captain Campbell was going to find use for his coal; that his mysterious steamer was on her way north in spite of McCoun's mission.

It was the *Nvota*, Captain Webster's steam whaler, that Corporal Strakeleys and Private Ebeling sighted and that all Herschel Island watched as she came puffing around the island on the second of August. In mid-afternoon, the sturdy little whaler, almost lost in her cloud of smoke, drew into the bay a 3,000-ton steamer, white once, but now discolored by the salt spray and scarred by the ice; her funnels smokeless, but flying proudly at the fore, a pennant bearing the word "*Aleutian*."

On her deck could be made out a few members of a crew, two men in officers' uniform, two other

men who appeared to be passengers, and three boys.

Long before the *Nvota* cast off her tow and the anchor of the stranger plunged into the water, the white men of Herschel Island were hastening over the waters of the bay in a slender canoe. Captain Campbell, of the *Yosemite*, was in the bow. When a ruddy-faced man leaned over the bridge of the *Aleutian* and lifted his cap, Captain Campbell rose and hailed the stranger:

"I 'm Captain Campbell, of the *Yosemite*," he shouted.

Instantly came a response from the *Aleutian*.

"Is Mr. Osborne here?"

"Is n't he aboard?" was Captain Campbell's answer.

The reply of the man on the strange steamer was lost. But the men in the canoe were startled by three almost simultaneous shouts. Then they saw the three boys on the silent steamer grab each other by the shoulders and begin a riotous dance on the deck. Finally, and to their further mystification, being now abreast the big steamer, they heard one boy yell:

"Good. The boss ain't here. We can't get away. We 're stuck for a winter in the Barren Lands."

CHAPTER II

LEON DU FOUR IS INTRODUCED

Never before had a passenger vessel visited that remote corner of the world. To the "Company" factor, the mounted police—men who are mounted in name only, for no horse has ever set foot on Herschel Island—and the Whale Company agent, the *Aleutian* came like a messenger of mercy. More than curiosity shone on the faces of those in the bobbing canoe, and when the red-faced officer on the bridge again lifted his cap to the visitors, there was instant and enthusiastic response.

"Come aboard," exclaimed the *Aleutian's* officer.

The landing ladder was already in place, and in a few moments the island visitors were scrambling up the side. Almost at the same time, Skipper Lem Webster's gig made fast. On deck, there was an animated scene. Captain Campbell was master of ceremonies. With a confusion of handshakings, he presented his island friends.

"Ye have hearty welcome," responded the *Aleutian* skipper, who had introduced himself as Cap-

tain Thomas McKay. "Well noo," he added smiling "this is what Ay'd ca' a sonsie reception. Gie us yer hans, a' o' ye."

In turn, Captain McKay introduced the *Aleutian* party. This included: Major Baldwin Honeywell, late of the U. S. Army, and Colonel Oje, of Dolores, Colorado—sheep rancher, banker and all-round sportsman—both part owners of the *Aleutian*, and representing its absent chief owner, J. W. Osborne, of Boston—; Ned Napier and Alan Hope, of Chicago, lads yet well in their teens, known as the "Airship Boys", by reason of their marvelous aeronautical exploits; Robert Russell, their close friend and companion, and reporter on the *Kansas City Comet*; Mr. Wales, mate; and Mr. Jackson, chief engineer.

As the boisterous greetings slackened, Factor Hayward, his worn skin tam o' shanter in his hand, exclaimed:

"Whatever brings ye to our Arctic city, gentlemen, ye are welcome. Make yourselves at home,"—then he laughed—"ef it looks like ye could make it a home."

"Thank you," answered Major Honeywell, "we may go the limit with you. Like as not we 're here for the winter."

Then, at Captain McKay's suggestion, all made

their way aft to the dining cabin. Yoshina, the Japanese waiter, had anticipated this. A fresh, white cloth covered the long table; the tea urn was hissing, a box of cigars was open, and, near Captain McKay's seat, there were several bottles and glasses.

As the party was about to seat itself, Ned Napier, one of the three young men on the *Aleutian*—a boy about eighteen years old—exclaimed:

“Where 's the Indian?”

Factor Hayward looked puzzled. But Ned rushed from the apartment and almost immediately reappeared with the quarter-breed Dufour. Factor Hayward's puzzled look deepened, but, Major Honeywell bowing formally to the Indian and indicating a chair, the savage seated himself with dignity.

“I thank you,” he exclaimed in good English with, perhaps, a slight French accent.

Looks of astonishment passed between the *Aleutian* people. As fragrant cigar smoke filled the room and the glasses of the elder men clinked, formalities were lost. Aside from the boys, who neither drank nor smoked, Private Ebeling, of the police contented himself with a cigar.

Dufour, the quarter-breed, declined both spirits and cigars. When Bob Russell, the reporter, prof-

ferred him claret, he bowed and graciously accepted the glass. Colonel Oje, the Mexican ranch owner, was also watching the savage guest. The ranchman leaned forward and offered the dignified Indian his own silver cigarette case.

"Merci, mo'sieu," exclaimed Dufour, with a smile, helping himself. Then, as if recalling himself, the Indian added:

"Thank you, very much."

Again the lads almost gasped in surprise. Ned Napier and Alan Hope, the airship boys, and Bob Russell, the reporter, exchanged new glances of open astonishment.

"An Arctic Chesterfield," whispered Alan.

"Looks good to me," muttered Russell, always on the lookout for the unusual. "Me for the story of Leon Dufour. Ain't any mistake about it—he's got one."

But the newly aroused curiosity of the three boys was interrupted by the sound of Major Honeywell's voice. This dignified gentleman was now on his feet.

"Gentlemen of Herschel Island," he was saying, "after a conference with Colonel Oje, it has been agreed that one statement in the presence of all here will best make known why the *Aleutian* is in this harbor. You are naturally somewhat curi-

ous, I assume, and we feel that an explanation should be made. In brief, the *Aleutian* sailed from San Francisco in April on a secret commercial expedition. Our plan was to steam directly to this island. Unfortunate accidents interfered. We were caught in the ice, held for some weeks, and in attempting to escape, broke our propeller shaft."

Every one looked understandingly at Captain Webster, all at once realizing that it had been the *Nvota's* good fortune to rescue the big steamer.

"We were found by Captain Webster," went on Major Honeywell, "and towed into this harbor. But, before this came about, my young friends here, Ned Napier and Alan Hope, in attempting to reach Herschel Island by dirigible balloon and aeroplane, had a most remarkable experience."

All the Herschel Island men except Leon Du-four edged forward in astonishment.

"In their *White North* airship, these boys were caught in a storm and driven within twelve miles of the north pole."

"The north pole?" gasped Gompers.

"They will give you the details later," continued the major, with a proud smile. "Subsequently, in attempting to reach land to the south,

they met with another strange adventure. Captain Webster can tell you how he found them adrift on an ice floe whereon they had made a discovery that almost exceeds belief—nothing less than the half-century old hulk of a wrecked Russian trader full of fossil and sea ivory—treasure worth, perhaps, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.”

Exclamations of paralyzing wonder broke forth.

“It ’s safe over there in the *Nvota*,” interrupted Captain Webster, puffing at his cigar with smiling unction.

“Fifty years old?—And ivory?” cried Gompers. “Why—?”

“I ’ll show it ye,” chuckled the skipper of the *Nvota*. “An’ a third of it ’s mine, to say nothin’ o’ salvage on the *Aleutian*, which claim I ain’t pressin’ howsumever.”

“One minute, gentlemen,” continued Major Honeywell, as there were signs of the party breaking up in its excitement. “We are here—the *Aleutian*, the Airship Boys, and the best part of their air craft, the *White North*. With a broken shaft, we could n’t leave, if we wanted to. But we don’t want to. Captain Webster is going to leave at once for the Golden Gate with his rich cargo. Cir-

cumstances force the *Aleutian* to remain behind. The *Yosemite* will stay with us."

"Bully!" exclaimed young Ebeling, of the police.

"We are forced to do this because Mr. Osborne, our chief owner, has not joined us here as he had hoped. Had we reached Herschel Island, a month ago, and had Mr. Osborne been here, as he expected, the *Aleutian* would have steamed away at once. The failure of Mr. Osborne to reach the island on time and our accident means that we shall winter among you. Our plans for the future are a business secret. I can say nothing of them. Mr. Jackson will repair the broken shaft if he can. If this cannot be done, the *Nvota* will return early next summer with a new one. Either this fall or next spring, Mr. Osborne will join us. Then we will proceed on our delayed voyage."

For a time the guests sat in silence; then Gompers, of the Whale Company, remarked awkwardly:

"And Donald McCoun—him as cast up here in March, an' left on the long trail to Dawson? I reckon he was one o' your men? Mebbe he had somethin' to do with what ye can't tell?"

Major Honeywell thought a moment, smiled, and then answered, slowly:

“Mr. Osborne and others are interested in some valuable property in this part of the world. He was with us on our voyage from San Francisco as far as the Aleutian Islands. At that point, he received by telegraph and wireless a message that Donald McCoun carried to Dawson City from his agents in this northern wilderness. The message was such that Mr. Osborne returned at once to Seattle. After transacting certain business, he was to make the long journey down the Athabasca, the Great Slave and the McKenzie Rivers and re-join us. He has not come. We can only await him.”

At this point the formalities of the table came to an end. The dozen or more who were present grouped themselves according to age and disposition. In that part of the world, the Hudson Bay factor represents not only commerce but the English government. Captains McKay, Campbell and Webster; Major Honeywell, Colonel Oje, Factor Hayward, and Trader Engellard retired to Major Honeywell's big stateroom on the forward deck.

Gompers, the Whale Company agent, an American from Seattle, and longing for his kind, lingered with the boys and the two policemen, Strakeleys and Ebeling. The latter in their half uniform, with their regulation hats set jauntily, made

friends at once with the lads. Ebeling's well set-up figure, his tawny little clipped mustache, and his snappy, wide-set eyes were enough in themselves to open a highway into the boys' hearts.

"He 's certainly somebody," whispered Alan to his companions.

"He and the Indian understand each other, that 's sure," whispered Bob in turn. "Notice how they watched each other?"

"I say, Gompers, old man," Ebeling was saying, as his face broke into a smile and his white teeth glistened, "was n't a bad guess, after all, was it—that of Leon's?"

Gompers' grunt in way of a reply was lost; but the boys saw the Indian smile in turn. Thereupon they began plying their guests with an avalanche of questions, and in a few moments Ebeling, Shakeleys and Gompers were busy enough. As the adventure-hungry lads gazed away into the wonderland south of them and listened to the story of the strange world into which they had come, all else was forgotten. It was late afternoon; the misty haze as of autumn lay on both water and land, and the low circling sun was far in the west behind the vague heights of the mountain land.

"I can't describe it," said Ebeling to Ned.

"You 've got to live it. When you have, you 'll understand. There 's no other land like it in the world. The smallest thing in it is man. The bravest, the hardiest, the most daring explorers the world has known have beaten their way across it and back, from ocean to ocean. And they 've left us no more trace of it all than a ship leaves on the sea."

"What are you doing here?" asked Ned in a low voice.

Ebeling's face sobered.

I 'm a policeman," he answered.

"And you left England and your family to watch a village of Eskimos in the Arctic?" continued Ned.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Not altogether," he replied. "But, good bye, for to-day. We 're going now. Come to headquarters when you can."

A little later, the factor's canoe having pulled away from the *Aleutian*, three boys ran forward to the bridge to watch its graceful flight. Engellard in the bow and Leon Dufour in the stern were sweeping the fragile craft forward with deft, powerful strokes.

"And to think of it," exclaimed Alan, "we 're here at last. It makes my mouth water."

“Goin’ to make sleepin’ seem a loss of time,” added Russell with a laugh.

Ned touched them on their arms and pointed away to the southwest where a cloud-like blot lay on the horizon.

“Don’t forget the big thing, fellows,” he exclaimed. “That cloud is the cliffs on the far side of the McKenzie’s mouth. When you get there and look ahead, you will see the real wilderness. That ’s where *they* begin—the Great Barren Lands.”

“And somewhere in ’em, or beyond,” added Alan, “I suppose Major Honeywell ’s goin’ to find what he ’s longing for, the Secret of the White Eskimos.”

“And there,” added Bob Russell hastily, turning and pointing to the fast receding canoe, “is the one man who can lead him to it—the quarter-breed, Indian Leon Dufour.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Alan as all fixed their eyes on the bending figure of Dufour in the stern of the canoe.

“I mean,” answered Bob,” that we are now looking at one of the strongest men I ever saw. The men of the Hudson Bay Company may know the secrets of this wilderness as white men; the Eskimo and the Indian may understand its secrets

as they are known to the savages; but in this breed—as they call him—I bet you ’ll find the answer to more mysteries of the northland than in the oldest voyageur or the most ancient native.”

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING EBELING OF THE POLICE

“You know all about this Indian, don’t you?” said Ned to Russell.

“Not yet, but I will to-morrow.”

“Ebeling—” began Ned.

“Say, Ebelin’s all right, is n’t he?” broke Alan Hope. “He ’s only from England six years. Says he knows an Indian who has two silver fox skins that I can buy—if Factor Hayward don’t find out about it.”

“What if Mr. Hayward does know it?” asked Ned—dropping Dufour for the moment. “What difference would that make?”

“Competition,” announced Alan. “The Company fixes the price of furs, and it and the Indian can’t agree. The Indian has brought the skins in for three years in succession. The Company stands pat and so does the native. Ebeling can show me the Indian.”

“Why are you so dead set on gettin’ a couple of silver fox skins?” asked Bob. “An’ so early in the game?”

"I reckon you have n't got a sister Mary back home," laughed Alan.

At the mention of Alan's sister's name, Ned at once showed interest.

"Do you suppose Mary would like a fox skin?" he asked impulsively.

Alan laughed:

"Not *a* fox skin. But there is n't a woman in the world who wouldn't give part of her right arm, almost, for a silver fox coat. That means *several* skins."

"Well," spoke up Bob smartly, "if your sister wants one, I know another fellow's sister that would probably like another. Let 's pick up a dozen or so of these silver fox pelts."

"Do you know what those skins sell for in London?" Alan asked in a sort of awed voice. The other boys shook their heads.

"Only two thousand dollars apiece!" exclaimed Alan.

Ned and Bob looked at each other blankly. Then, before Alan could continue on the fox skin question, Ned raised his hand:

"That 's what you got from Ebeling. He *is* all right. This is what I got—"

"One minute," interrupted Bob. "Don't believe he did n't talk to me. He told me—" then he

paused and looked at Ned. "Beg your pardon—after you Ned. What did he tell you? You have the floor."

"It 'll keep," laughed Ned. "Go on, what did our new friend say to you?"

"It was n't about fox skins, but, he said, that low gray line over there to the east'ard is where the McKenzie Islands stop and the rocky coast line begins. If you follow it north, you will come to Cape Parry. Then it turns southeast. It 's a sort of rocky wall between musk ox land and the ocean."

"Go on," suggested Alan. "What 's coming?"

"In those cliffs," continued Bod, with well assumed indignation, "lives Nuliayok, the Supreme Goddess of the Eskimos. She has many homes, and they are all caves. Guess what 's in 'em? Need n't guess, I 'll tell you—walrus teeth and mammoth tusks—that 's all! A little more bone, if we have n't got enough."

"Commonplace," commented Alan. "Hardly worth looking into. Go on, Ned."

"Well," began Ned at last. "He did n't tell me much. Only this—who Leon Dufour is. That Indian," went on Ned turning toward the shore settlement again where the *Aleutian's* visitors were already landing, has n't been anywhere much but

all over this country from Hudson Bay to Dawson, winter and summer, on foot, sledge and by canoe, and, incidentally to London and Paris for eight years."

"London!" exclaimed Alan.

"Paris!" added Bob.

"Both," continued Ned—"gettin' educated."

"And then came back here to live on seal brains, walrus blubber and whale skin?" gasped Alan.

"Sometimes not even that," suggested Bob. "I certainly guessed right as to Leon. We must n't lose him."

"Listen," went on Ned. "I don't recall names but here 's the story. Sixty years ago a Frenchman named Dufour was sent to the Hudson Bay Company post at Ft. Resolution. He married a Loucheux Indian woman, and a boy was born. That boy grew up, speaking his father's French and he in turn married another Loucheux Indian. *Our* Indian was his son. When this boy, Leon, was twelve years old, his grandfather left the Company on a pension, and took his grandson to France. It seems the old man amounted to something at home—had folks or money—maybe both. The quarter-breed was sent from Paris to school in England. Ebeling says that what was in the Indian had to come out. English and French

schools could n't get the smell o' the wilderness out of the kid's system. When his grandfather died, he turned his back on boulevards and parks, shipped on a steamer for Churchill on Hudson Bay, and then, on foot, made his way back to the McKenzie, the land, as Ebeling says, of moose meat and mosquitoes.

"What does he do?" asked Alan. "What 's his trade?"

Ned 's face broke into a smile.

"Ebeling seems to be something of a philosopher—"

"Or a romancer," interrupted Alan.

"He puts it this way: Leon Dufour shoots and fishes like a gentleman all over the continent from the Rockies to Hudson Bay, attends to his own business, makes a few furs each winter, and pities the poor whalers."

In this manner, the three boys began their acquaintance with the strange Indian. The formality of receiving the island guests had brought the hour up to nearly six o'clock, and scores of things had to be done before there could be any thought of going ashore.

Captains Webster, Campbell and McKay continued in conference for some time preceding the dinner. When this meal was served, about eight

o'clock, Major Honeywell announced that Engineer Jackson had decided that the *Yoesmite* shaft would fit the *Aleutian*.

As a result, Captain Campbell, who had already spent one winter in the Arctic, had determined to return to San Francisco by way of Bering Straits, with Captain Webster in the *Nvota*. There he would secure a new shaft for the *Yosemite*, and either on the *Nvota* or some other whaler, bring it to Herschel Island in the following summer. This involved new financial arrangements with Major Honeywell, which were entered into that evening.

"How much time will these repairs require?" asked Major Honeywell of Mr. Jackson at dinner.

"Five or six days, by crowding things," was the answer.

It was then August second. The *Aleutian* might be in service by August sixth. That left ample time to reach and pass through Bering Straits before the September ice. But those on the *Aleutian* had no plans looking that way. Would the steamer refill its bunkers with coal from the *Yosemite* and start on some other cruise in the month or more of summer remaining? Captain Campbell put such a question to Major Honeywell.

"Not without orders," was the major's re-

sponse. "And these we are not likely to get now. Even if Mr. Osborne were to appear here at this time, it is hardly probable that our plans would be put into effect this year. The ice may close in a month—where we are going. There 's hardly enough time."

"That being true," spoke up Colonel Oje, "and as we are all here, including all our captains, I want to recall the suggestion made by Mr. Osborne just before he left us. It was his idea that if the *Aleutian* were compelled to winter at this island, any one who didn't want to stay might go back on the returning *Yosemite*."

"Those interested in my cargo or any others," Captain Webster explained, with a smile, "are welcome to come with us. It 'll be a long v'yage, five thousand mile or more, but we 'll be in port afore November first."

"As a business man, I ought to go," said Colonel Oje; "but I 'm not. It 's the best chance I 'll ever get at musk ox and wood buffalo."

Major Honeywell turned with a laugh to Bob Russell.

"Can your paper spare you, Mr. Russell?" he asked. "Do you see anything here worth your attention?"

"I see Leon Dufour," exclaimed Bob, at once.

"I 'll bet he 's got enough adventure and romance bottled up in him to make a half dozen books."

"And you, Alan?" went on Major Honeywell.

"We 've lost our dirigible balloon," answered Alan. "It 's up there somewhere in the Arctic. But we 've got the aeroplane-ice-yacht and sledge. Ned and I 'll be right here ready for business any time you need us. We signed up for the voyage, and we' ll only leave the *Aleutian* when that 's at an end. Besides," he added chuckling, "I can't go. I 've got to collect a mess of silver fox skins."

The veteran whale captains laughed uproariously.

"Good luck to him," exclaimed the skipper of the *Nvota*. "I been a whalin' on these coasts ten year. That 's the only bit o' fur I ever promised the old lady. An' I ain't never got none yet. Ain't never even seen none."

"I know a man who knows where I can get two," announced Alan proudly.

"Ebeling?" asked Captain Campbell at once. Alan nodded his head.

Again the skippers of the *Yosemite* and the *Nvota* broke out into laughter. Then Captain Webster, his face red with merriment, leaned over the table, and said:

"That 's nothin' to what Ebeling 'll be tellin' ye

afore ye been here long. Ebeling ain't no common truck. He 's got eddication an' imagination, too, if that 's the word. Some folks reckon 'at he 's a Englishman come o' the nobility. A lord or somepin. Leastways, he 's purty much a liar ur, anyways, a story don't lose nothin' by his tellin' of it."

"A sort of humorist?" suggested Major Honeywell.

"Mebbe," went on Captain Webster. "On'y, don't believe all 'at he tells ye."

"Thar you 're right," exclaimed Captain Campbell. "I knowed him nigh a year. Ef them Gogmollys an' Nunkamutes knows half he says they 'a told him, they air got a history longer 'an the cyclopeedy. He 's told me, personal, 'at they 's caves 'round beyant Cape Parry full o' fairies ur goddesses ur sich guardin' heaps o' ivory an' shell."

"Ever look for them?" interrupted Alan impulsively.

"Me?" retorted the veteran Lem. "Not so as ye could notice it."

"When he gets good an' warmed up, he 'll tell ye wuss 'n that," volunteered Captain Campbell. "I got a notion 'at he an' that French-Injun Leon cook up half o' these tales between 'em. Leon

ain't no slouch hisself when he condescends to talk—which ain't but once in so often. It 's a fine partnership. Leon kin shoot Loucheux lingo at ole Ilygobok, o' the Kogmollys—an' I reckon he 's the oldest Eskimo in the hull world. Ole Ilygobok comes back about things in the sea an' on the land which no one can't believe, an' to ornament 'em up, the breed he transfers 'em to Ebeling, lord or whatsumever he is, an' when he gets them tales trimmed, I reckon ole Ilygobok hisself 'd say they was lies."

The captain's speech set all the boys smiling. Bob Russell fairly chuckled.

"Must be very interesting," said Major Honeywell, the first to speak.

"Ef ye like that kind o' dope," almost snorted Captain Campbell. "I had to stand for it all winter—all the way from the story o' a big continent out thar in Beaufort Sea, with skeletons o' lions and tigers on it to White Eskimos some'eres over in the Barren Lands."

Before the last of that short speech had been reached, Major Honeywell shot his body half across the table.

"White Eskimos?" he repeated excitedly, his cigar trembling in his nervous fingers, while the

three boys sprang to their feet. "Who knows about White Eskimos?"

The talkative captain looked about in consternation.

"Who knows?" he began. "What 's alarmin' ye? Ye don't have to believe it. Nobody does."

"Some people do," interrupted Ned Napier. "Where are these Eskimos?"

"Humph!" grunted the *Nvota* commander. "Ebeling says 'at Leon Dufour says 'at somebody told him 'at he heerd some one says 'at thar 's White Eskimos some'eres."

"Where?" insisted Major Honeywell.

"When he told it to me," interrupted Campbell, "he jist pinte toward them Barren Lands an' thar bein' no trolley cars down that way, I did n't listen to no more."

Captain Webster added:

"That 's it—the Barren Lands—forty sleeps over the ice an' snow. Note the directions keerful, an' ye 'll come to the place o' the White Eskimos."

"Thank you," exclaimed Major Honeywell sinking back in his chair. "We 'll try to find them."

CHAPTER IV

BOB RUSSELL HAS AN IDEA

When Captains Webster and Campbell at last took their leave, Major Honeywell gave signs of retiring, but Colonel Oje, lighting a fresh cigar, waved him back to his chair.

“Not yet, Major,” he exclaimed, his face beaming; “to-morrow is going to be one of our busy days. We ’re a family party now. Let ’s talk it over—”

“Sure,” broke in Bob. “We ’ve got a lot to talk about.”

“A little council of war?” suggested the major. “All right. Who ’s first?”

“You ’re in charge,” said Ned Napier. “We ought to hear from you.”

“I suppose you boys are mighty eager to stretch your legs ashore,” replied the major. “But I think shore excursions had better be put off a day or so. In the morning, Captain Webster will begin re-coaling the *Nvota* from the *Yosemite*. All crews will help. Captain McKay, Mr. Jackson and the

Yosemite engineer will begin work on the shaft."

"Can't we help?" put in Ned.

"While we have the men here, we are going to re-coal the *Aleutian*," went on Major Honeywell.

"That means our own decks must be cleared. You youngsters must transfer the *White North* aeroplane from the *Nvota*, and find a place for it on the *Aleutian* out of the way of the coal. We 're pretty well mussed up after our four months in the ice. You can help get everything shipshape both above and below decks. There 's a lot to do."

"I 'm glad we 're going at it right away," exclaimed the methodical Alan. "Let 's do everything needed at once."

"Major," asked Colonel Oje, blowing out a new volume of smoke, "where do I come in?"

"You mean, when are you going to get started after musk ox and buffalo," replied the major, laughing. "You can do that as soon as you like. But, I can't excuse any of our boys till we 're shipshape—say in about three days."

Colonel Oje shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I 've got plenty of time," he replied good naturedly.

"Ye 'll be havin' ten month," remarked Captain McKay dryly.

"In about three days, the most of us 'll be free,"

continued Major Honeywell. "Captain Webster will have left us. Then, while Mr. Jackson finishes his work, the rest of us—"

"Ye 'll nae be includin' me in ony lan' projects," interrupted Captain McKay. "I 'll hae juties an' to spare on the boat wi' paintin' an' reriggin', an' stowin' coal. When the ship's anchor goes down, work comes up. Winter 'll be on us agin afore ye well know 't."

"Well, *some* of us," smiled the major. "As soon as we can, the portable, wood-burning steamer is to be put together. That 's for Colonel Oje and the McKenzie and big game."

"And for me," broke in Bob, "you know I 'm assigned to Colonel Oje on those expeditions."

"Meanwhile, our naphtha launch must be put in order. It 'll be just the thing for cruising in close waters."

"Up to Cape Parry and the mastodon caves, for instance," suggested Ned.

"I can see that you boys have a fine program ahead," commented Colonel Oje. "But you 'd better come with me—all of you; make it a party. The more the merrier."

"You forget the big thing," interrupted Ned. "Who 's going to help Major Honeywell find the White Eskimos?"

A wave of merriment spread around the table. Major Honeywell seemed most amused.

"I 'll take care of the White Eskimos alone," laughed the major. "When vacation time comes, we 'll scatter. Each fellow can chase his own own hobby. If I get track of my albinos of the Arctics and need help, I 'll call for volunteers."

"An' good luck to ye all," concluded Captain McKay. "May ye all bag yer fill o' silver fox pelts, an' cave goddesses an' bones, musk ox heads an' moose antlers, White Eskimos or what ye like. But don't be forgettin' the summer 's soon o'er, an' ut's easier comin' back on the water than o'er the ice an' snow."

Just as the boys were about to turn in, there was another incident of interest to close the day. The *Nvota*, its dense smoke adding to the dusk of the long-delayed sunset, drew alongside the *Aleutian* once more, and, acting as a tug, moved the big steamer close to the silent *Yosemite*. Then Captain Webster's whaler took station on the opposite side of the collier, and made fast. Everything was ready to begin coaling with daylight and to transfer the *Yosemite's* shaft to the *Aleutian*.

Comfortably in port, the younger of the *Aleutian's* passengers kept their cosy berths long after the three-o'clock sunrise. The double state-

rooms, twenty-nine and thirty-one, used by Ned and Alan, had come to be a real home to the boys. These rooms were large, and each had originally contained a single brass bed. Some weeks before, a double bed had been moved into one room and the other had been turned into a combination library and study.

Bob Russell had squeezed his typewriter into one corner of this cheery apartment, and he used the room with his companions. And it was a boys' room all over. Charts secured from Captain McKay were tacked on the walls, and three shelves of books filled the space between the big windows looking out on the deck. Over these, was a section of a mammoth tusk held in place by a network of sealskin thongs. This bit of fossil ivory was grotesquely carven and was one of the chief prizes found on the ice-entombed Russian trader. A few smaller bits, walrus ivory knives and narwhal spear heads were conspicuous on the red-topped table. In corners of the room stood snow shoes, modern Eskimo spears, and rifles and on the walls were fastened many pictures made by Russell.

The skin garments—hoods, coats and boots—that the three boys had secured at Unalaska, were,

by common consent, hung in the wireless telegraph room on the deck below.

“Aleutian furs are beautiful, after they ‘ve been to London and come back all ready for the young ladies,” Bob would say, “and they ‘re fine out on the ice at forty below; but in here—well, I prefer cologne or bay rum.”

On the table in this study—steam heated and made cheerful in the coldest weather by the home-like base burner stove in the dining saloon just without—the three boys dreamed and planned. Thereon, Captain McKay helped them figure their share of the Russian traders’ treasure. Estimating it at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars usually, the boys never tired of speculating on the possibilities of their third.

Now that they would have comparative summer for from four to six weeks, the boys would, for that period, make less use of this room. But winter was coming—a winter on the edge of the Barren Lands. While not absent on expeditions in the interior, there would be quiet days and nights in which to read, write and talk. In this part of the world, the sun would disappear about December second, and remain below the horizon until January twelfth.

While Ned and Alan were dressing, sleep being

no longer possible because of the activity on the three adjacent vessels, Bob broke into their sleeping cabin. He was clad in his blue sweater, stiff-soled, water-proof, laced shoes and his old, natty, cowboy hat.

"Say," he began, "I have an idea. If I 've beat you to it, acknowledge the corn. We move the aeroplane to-day, don't we? From the *Nvota* to the *Aleutian*?"

"That 's the program," answered Ned, eyeing Bob's somewhat summery costume with apparent envy.

"Here 's the idea," continued Bob hastily. "That program 's wrong. You 're goin' to use the machine right along, I reckon; visitin' caves an' what not. What 's the use o' bringin' it on the *Aleutian*? Can't do anything with it here—can't get a start to make a flight. Why not set up an aerodrome, or whatever you call it, over on the shore an' keep the machine there?"

Ned looked at Alan, and both boys smiled. Then, chuckling, he ran into the next room and secured an indelible pencil from the table. Hastening back to the sleeping room, he wrote on the white door: "August third. Bob Russell. Score one. Aerodrome for *White North* on Herschel Island."

“Go on,” exclaimed Bob, somewhat disgruntled, “make fun of me.”

“To show how funny it is,” answered Ned, stopping his laughing, and looking at Alan again, “I ’ll just say that the idea ’ll be carried out right off the reel, if I have anything to say about it.”

“We could take the old balloon shed canvas,” suggested Alan, “and make a tent and charge the what-do-you-call-’ems—the natives—”

“Kogmollycs, Nunatalmutes and Loucheux Indians, two hundred and fifty of ’em,” explained the exact young reporter.

“Well, Kogmollix an’ None-at-all-mutes—charge ’em, say, whatever they got we want.”

“A silver fox skin?” suggested Ned, with a quizzical smile.

“Oh, no,” said Alan, knitting his brows, “make it a popular show, something like ten, twenty and thirty, and charge each of ’em one of those carved walrus tusk cribbage boards the whalers taught ’em to make.”

“Let me see,” exclaimed Bob soberly, “asumin’ that each one goes only once, and allowin’ free tickets for the whites and Leon Dufour, that would be two hundred and fifty ivory cribbage boards. What are they worth?”

“Captain Webster has six that he ’s taking to

San Francisco. He says he can get from seventy-five to one hundred dollars apiece for 'em."

The boys laughed. Then Bob took Ned's pencil and made a calculation.

"That 's all right," he said, at last. "Averagin' 'em up at \$87.50 apiece, that makes \$21,875. And we would n't be at much expense. Like as not, they don't require any license for shows up here."

There was a sound of laughter in the adjoining library, and the three boys turned to see Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje.

"What twenty-one thousand dollars is this, so early in the morning?" asked Colonel Oje, good humoredly.

"Oh, only an idea of Bob's. That 's all."

While the party proceeded to breakfast, enjoying itself over the joke, Captain McKay and Captain Webster came in—the latter a guest. Both skippers joined in the merriment. Finally, Captain Webster remarked:

"I hate to throw any cold water on such a promising' projek, but I reckon I 'll have to. I sarched ever' tupik on the island fur them boards this spring. Ef they 's one of 'em left, it 's so little 'at I could n't find it."

“Stung!” exclaimed Bob, soberly. “An’ just as we were countin’ the coin.”

Every one agreed that Bob’s idea about a temporary house on the island for the aeroplane was an excellent one. And the moment the breakfast was over, the boys were only too glad to make a quick trip to the shore to look over the ground. The temptation to remain and make an excursion in the settlement and up over the heights was almost irresistible, but it was work first and pleasure afterwards. It made the boys kick their heels, however, to even get their feet on the ground once more after nearly three months of deck and ice floe.

“Somebody ’s mistaken,” exclaimed Ned, as the *Aleutian’s* dingy approached the shore at the center of the settlement. “He did n’t mean two hundred and fifty natives; he meant twenty-five hundred.”

The crowd on the beach seemed almost to warrant this. It was a picturesque group. The hoodless Eskimos, their light skin clothing and black, straight hair fluttering on the cool morning breeze, were lined up in idle curiosity. And in their midst, stood three of the white men who had visited the newly-arrived steamer the day before.

Factor Hayward was foremost. He forced the

boys to accompany him to the Company headquarters. As the visitors made their way through the crowd of dignified, unsmiling islanders, the boys made quick surveys of the surroundings. Engellard and Gompers gave them cordial welcome.

Each boy had for years read of Hudson Bay Company stations. Entering the post, instead of a big room, beamed with hand-wrought logs, gay with pelts and red blankets, they found themselves in a low cabin, paper-lined and smoke begrimed, suffocatingly thick with heavy odors, and, at first glance, a cross between a wareroom and the office of the most humble hotel.

“No silver fox skins here,” whispered Alan.

“Ain’t a tradin’ store at all,” added Bob in a low voice.

“Not a trapper in sight,” muttered Ned.

CHAPTER V

FACT AND FICTION

“ ’T ain’t what you expected, is it, boys?” exclaimed Factor Hayward suddenly, as he led his visitors to a side of the room where, next to a low, black fireplace, there was a table, and a few stools and benches.

“To tell the truth,” exclaimed Ned, “it is n’t just what I expected. You know the stories of the wilderness—”

“That ’s it,” interrupted the rough factor. “I ’ve read ’em—some of ’em. They make ye think these places is all like a stage set up fur actin’. Some I ’ve read tells it like as ef all the time thar was a gurglin’ stream runnin’ by, an’ on its banks, a lot o’ Injuns settin’ by campfires a mendin’ canoes an’ a singin’ songs with trappers, an’ traders in the house a balein’ up skins fit to sink a ship.”

“Distance does lend enchantment, I suppose,” suggested Russell, smiling.

“Distance? Enchantment?” repeated the grizzled factor, with a hard smile. “Why, Son, it

ain't even true down thar," and he nodded his head toward the mainland to the south. "Leastways, not in my day. Them swift streams 'at 's in the books whar the Injun's canoe darts in an' out o' the shadders sunk to the gunnels with furs worth a king's ransom is froze ten months of each year. When they ain't froze, they 's hid by flies and muskeeters 'at even a Injun can't stand. You want to know how them cargoes o' furs worth a king's ransom comes shootin' in? Ole Dog Rib an' his two ur three wives, and childurn that ye can't reckon, comes driftin' in with a box o' skins that ain't worth weighin', a long face, a powerful thirst, an' a cryin' fur another year's credit an' a calico shirt to keep the flies off 'm him."

The boys could not refrain from smiling. Ned exclaimed:

"I suppose things do change. But, whatever has happened to the Indian, this great empire of the wilderness is still here—"

"You bet she is," replied the factor, who had seated his guests, but who stood, himself; "an' she 'll stay here, a million years ur more, ef she likes—fur as I 'm concerned," and he hit the greasy table with his fist.

"You and Mr. Gompers seem of the same mind," said Alan, a little timidly.

The factor almost sneered.

“Ye must n’t make no sich comparisons. Me and Gompers ain’t o’ one mind together on nothin’. He ’s sore, and fur why?—Because they ain’t a dance hall nur a bar ’round the corner. I ’m sore, too.—But fur why? I ’m disappointed an’ sick o’ waitin’.”

“Waitin’?” exclaimed Ned. “Waitin’ for what?”

“Fur the world down thar to git through a believin’ they ain’t nothin’ in our world up hyar but skins an’ pelts an’ glidin’ canoes.”

“We know there ’s a good deal more than that up here,” spoke up Alan promptly.

“Ye ain’t no conception,” was the factor’s instant answer. “Nobody has ’at ain’t lived hyar. An’ what ’s that to us? Us as stood alone a starvin’ an’ freezin’ an’ a waitin’ fur the rest o’ the world to find out what we found out long ago.”

“You mean—?” began Bob as the three boys began to edge forward, attracted by the weather worn factor’s earnestness.

“I mean ’at they ’s some of us at least ’at knows ’t here ’s over a million square miles o’ land whar God ’as dumped more riches ’an he used in makin’ all the rest o’ the Amerikin continent; ’at millions o’ men ’at air akillin’ each other an’ fightin’ to

live in civilized lands could come hyar by floatin' fur nothin' on God's own highway—on rivers they never even heerd of—an' take o' them riches without no trust's license nur permit." A still harder smile of scorn lit up the speaker's face.

"Ast me why I don't do it? I tried it, me an' others. An' we 've been licked. We 've waited fur them as might hev come and helped us, but I reckon they ain't on this earth. Leastways here I am. An' I 'm alone now an' waitin' yit. Fur what? The one boat 'at comes each summer an' brings me sow belly an' a letter sayin', "Why ain't the Injuns makin' more fur?" "

The three boys looked at each other in silence. Each knew of what the other was thinking—how there was one man at least who knew what Hayward knew; how the man who had sent them to the factor's land—J. W. Osborne, of Boston—understood.

"Perhaps," said Ned guardedly, at last, "if you wait a little longer some one may come."

The bearded, uncouth factor looked out of the open door a moment in silence. Then he pointed toward the big *Aleutian* lying at anchor far out in the cold, brown waters of the bay.

"What 's she doin' hyar?" he exclaimed suddenly; and as quickly he raised his hand as if to

stop and answer. “ ’T ain’t fur me to ast that,” he continued, in a lower voice. Striding back to the table, on which was a litter of worn account books, drying moccasins, black tobacco and reeking pipes, the man of the wilderness drew a stool to the end of it and threw his coatless arms across its surface. His skin cap had fallen to the floor. His iron-gray hair, redolent of the smoke of oil and tobacco, mounted his head like a mane. The ignorant, taciturn man of the day before seemed warmed into another being, as if by the fire of sudden determination. One hairy forearm arose and a crooked finger—begrimed almost beyond the power of the soap its owner did not own—trembled before Ned’s face.

“All young men,” Hayward began in a new voice, “all o’ ye. When I was your age, down thar in York State whar they was apple-butter, an’ sausage an’ buckwheat cakes, whar they was sunshine an’ summer an’ clover blossoms, I heerd that story about the pathless woods an’ the men who went willin’ into ’em. The books ye lads hev ain’t new books. I had ’em. I had n’t no eddication, an’ my hopes was correspondin’, but what I had went floatin’ away in them same canoes. Only I had ’em gracefuller ’an any picters—all gold brown in color an’ spotted with black pitch

'at seemed to smell in my nostrils. Sometimes they was porkeypine quills ornamentin' them golden craft."

The trembling finger paused, and the arm sank on the table.

"That were nigh fifty year ago. Between what never was and what is," and he moved a thick, heavy arm about as if to include all the rocky, wind-swept island, "there 's things you never dreamt of. I 've found 'em. I found what thar ain't but two other living white men seen—riches ye can't measure." For a moment, the old man sat silent and breathing hard, his hands grasping the edge of the table. Then, leaning forward again, he went on, in a whisper: "Riches waitin' fur the takin', riches 'at make men kings—all mine an' his—and us a suckin' rotten marrow bones with the dregs o' the earth an' waitin' to die."

In his interest, Ned had half risen. He seemed almost unable to longer restrain himself. He wanted to say to the hopeless man that there were those at hand who had heard the echoes of this story. He opened his mouth and then, with renewed determination, he sank back in silence. But the impulse of Bob Russell's journalistic instinct was not so easily restrained.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed the young reporter. “What riches? Where?”

The factor whirled about.

“Copper,” he almost shouted. “Copper fur America, copper fur Europe, copper fur the world.” Then he dropped on the table once more. “You ’ve got copper in the States, millions of tons of it. Why are them that have already stole it from the people also a stealin’ the copper mountains in Alaska? Not to dig more copper. They ’re doin’ it so they kin own all the mines on the continent. But they ’s one mine they don’t know about. They ’s one storehouse out o’ which the world kin draw ’at ain’t theirs. They ’s one hole hid away under the snow an’ ice ’at leads to treasure ’at they ain’t no end to, an’ don’t no one know but me an’ him. An’ we ’re waitin’. When them comes ’at knows an’ understan’s me an’ him—”

“Him? Who?” exclaimed Alan tremulously.

“My pardner. Him’ who ’s waitin’ like me. Him who ’s even older ’n I am, an’ who ’s a settin’ up thar in a land God ’s furgot.”

There was something so impressive in the words that the boys were speechless. Ned looked at each of his companions, and they all arose. Hayward was picking his cap from the floor. Bob seemed

about to say something more, but Ned shook his head. If what the old factor had said had any basis of truth, it might relate to the district in which Mr. Osborne was interested. Plainly, it was a matter to be referred to older heads—Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje—in the absence of their chief patron.

“What you ’ve told us is very interesting, Mr. Hayward,” said Ned, at last, as the boys prepared to leave. “I hope everything will turn out all right.”

“What ’s that steamer doin’ here?” burst from the factor suddenly. He had apparently forgotten his decision that he had no right to ask that question.

“We can’t tell you,” said Ned kindly, but positively.

“Are you lookin’ fur it? Are you lookin’ fur what ’s mine an’ his?” he asked, almost wildly, as he laid a hand on Ned’s arm.

“Perhaps you ’d better talk to Major Honeywell about that,” was Ned’s quiet reply.

The fire in the old man’s eyes seemed to flicker and die. Then he shook his head.

“We ’ve waited an’ we ’ll keep on waitin’ till the end,” he almost mumbled. “Ef they want what ’s mine an’ his let ’em come fur it.”

As the boys left the headquarters, the factor followed them a few yards and then, without further comment, turned sharply, re-entered the cabin and closed the door. While the lads stood, perplexed, a well-known voice saluted them. It was Ebeling, of the police, standing in the door of the police barracks.

“Howdy?” he exclaimed, with his constant smile. “Touring the city?”

After the rather depressing interview with the factor, the sight of the freshly-shaven young Englishman was most welcome.

“Where ’s the municipal building?” retorted Alan. “We ’re lookin’ for the official that issues amusement licenses. We want to exhibit an aeroplane.”

This called for explanation, whereupon the gay-spirited Ebeling, freshly charging his pipe and puckering his lips, saw fit to carry on the joke by assuming to possess the right to issue such a license. This meant that the delegation had to visit the police barracks. Here everything was the reverse of the Company cabin. One large room in the center of the long cabin was office and living apartment. At the ends, were cook and storerooms. A narrow stairway led to a half-

story loft above, where, Ebeling explained, there were sleeping quarters for six men.

The office room was discolored with smoke, but devoid of odors. The furniture at once showed that the men using the place were full of resources and ideas. Fur-covered chairs, couches, benches and stools had been fashioned of everything from driftwood to whales' bones. On the walls, cheap English color prints almost concealed the smoke-tinted logs. Guns, fishing tackle and boat utensils were plentiful, but in orderly disposition.

Corporal Strakeleys was in the cook and eating room washing dishes. After the two policemen had shown their treasures, mainly unusable marine gifts from wintering whaler captains, Ebeling sat down at the orderly table. While he cut off the white edge of an old magazine page, he said, very soberly:

"You must pardon our lack of formality, but the city stationer has been most remiss in his official duty. At present, we do not happen to have any printed forms. To tell the truth," he went on, "I can't even put my hand on a piece of writing paper. But this will serve."

On the little strip, he printed, very neatly, the following (the paper is now in Ned's library,

framed and displayed along with many another interesting souvenir):

“Permission is hereby given Napier, Hope and Russell to exhibit their aeroplane, the *White North*, on Herschel Island, Beaufort Sea, and all other lands and waters north of the Arctic Circle.

“H. M. EBELING,

“Emergency Clerk.

“P. S. License fee, a magazine that is less than a year old.”

“You ’re on,” laughed Bob. “We ’ve got a box full o’ books. We ’ll stock you up.”

“An’ if you please,” suggested Corporal Strakeleys, “if it ’s all the same to you, don’t include anything on polar exploration.”

Ned stopped laughing long enough to look at his watch. His whistle of surprise was warning enough. Taking charge of their permit, the boys were rejoiced to find both policemen anxious to accompany them. The search for the aerodrome site began at once, for over an hour had been lost in visiting and gossip. The spot required was not easily found, but one was at last selected.

This was in full view of the steamers, but well around on the west end of the cove. Here, about fifty feet above the bay, a little shelf on the hillside

seemed suited to the requirements. It was protected on the rear by a wall of rock, and in front the ground sloped gently toward the water. The incline was smooth enough to allow the aeroplane starting wheels free play, and there was enough soil on the shelf to permit the driving of pegs and the setting of the poles for the protecting wall of canvas.

"You boys take a good deal for granted," remarked Ebeling on the way back to the landing. "I 've been here two years an' on the river four. Strakeleys is worse off." Then he smiled. "Maybe I ought to wait an' see for myself, but I 'm just a little curious about this airship business. I 've seen a bad picture of one. That 's about as far as I can go."

The boys looked at each other with a little embarrassment.

"We might have known," blurted Ned. "I reckon we 're too busy with our own plans. I must apologize."

"Oh, don't think of it," protested the young policeman. "We 're used to waiting—up here. But you have n't any idea how fast the world moves on. We 're fine measurin' sticks. When I left civilization, they were n't thinking of flying-machines—as far as I know."

As some return for the hospitality they had received, the boys delayed their return to the steamer while Ned gave Ebeling and his companion an account of the latest aeroplanes. The wonder of it was such that the policemen could barely comprehend.

“It has come to you gradually,” said Ebeling, puzzled, “a little at a time. I have some knowledge of mechanics—school mechanics,” he added with a smile—“but a story like this, all at once—well, it ’s nearly too much for one dose. Actually *heavier than air!*” he added. “It don’t seem possible.”

“It ain’t possible,” announced Strakeleys authoritatively. “They ’re stringin’ us, Ebeling.”

The corporal’s words seemed to give Ebeling an idea. While all were laughing over the policeman’s skepticism, he motioned Ned to one side.

“You ’ll excuse me if I seem inquisitive,” said the Englishman in a low tone; “but it is n’t curiosity. Did Mr. Hayward talk to you awhile ago about his mine and his partner?”

“Yes,” answered Ned. “Why?”

“I ’m sorry for two reasons,” went on Ebeling soberly. “Mr. Hayward is a hard working old man who has suffered many hardships. Ordinarily he is balanced and methodical in his work; but,

periodically, and always when strangers arrive from the south, this story of a fabulous mine seems to take possession of him. Then, for a time, he is a different man. We even feel the need of watching him."

"Then it 's only imagination—a hallucination?" exclaimed Ned, in surprise.

"Anything can be true up here," replied Ebeling, with another of his smiles, "even White Eskimos. But, it is a story hard to believe."

"Thank you," said Ned. "He did seem a little excited."

The boy was silent a moment as if thinking, and then, to change the subject, he said:

"Can't you and Strakeleys come out and have dinner with us this evening? I want to ask you something."

Ebeling eyed him a moment, almost wistfully, and then said:

"Are you going to have real coffee and napkins?"

Ned laughed and nodded his head.

"I hope it 's informal. My dinner coat is—"

"At seven o'clock," laughed Ned, as he hurried away and scrambled into the waiting boat.

CHAPTER VI

AN ARCTIC AERODROME

The squat little whaler *Nvota*, the long, low collier *Yosemite* and the bigger *Aleutian* lay side by side, about six hundred yards off shore. As Bob Russell and Alan Hope swept the dingy forward, Ned, on the stern seat, could see activity on all three vessels. Lazy smoke was rising from the *Yosemite*, and her donkey engines were already at work. Bursts of black dust at regular intervals showed that the steam buckets were dropping fresh coal into the *Aleutian's* partly vacant bunkers.

As it was now mid-morning of an August day, Bob and Alan soon began to feel quite summery, even in that part of the world.

"Feels kind o' like goin' swimmin'," grunted Bob as he leaned to his oars.

"Don't bother about that," responded Ned. "It 'll never go as far as that—up here. Feels like it is just a goin' to be hot, some day, for a few weeks. Then, bing, it 's all off."

"Feels like it 's goin' to be a scorcher to-day,"

put in Alan, as he felt the long absent perspiration running down his nose.

"You 'll never be overcome by heat in this latitude," said Ned, swaying his body in time with his crab-catching oarsmen. "The sun gets highest up here on our longest day at home. That 's June twenty-first. An' even then, it don't climb up in the sky but a little over forty-five degrees above the horizon."

"Don't it ever get right up over head at any time?" asked Bob, pausing for breath.

Ned laughed. "Never," he answered. "If it did, it 'd be hot—just as hot as it is at home. Fall to," he ordered, and Bob resumed his oars. "We 've got scads to do to-day, an' we 've already lost two hours visitin'."

"Say," panted Alan, "what you fellows think of Mr. Hayward's yarn?"

Ned immediately told them what Ebeling had just said. The other boys listened in silence.

"But," he said, in conclusion, "I don't know. That old woodsman may know more than the folks around here. Mr. Osborne certainly thinks there is a great copper field somewhere in this part of the world. I don't see why Mr. Hayward could n't know all about it."

"Great country," commented Bob. "If things

keep on this way, I think there 's goin' to be something doin'. Think o' what we 've stumbled on in less than a day."

"What?" asked prosaic Alan.

"To begin with," answered Bob slowly and glancing bayward to note how far the dingy was from the vessels, "there 's that Indian, Dufour. It is certainly enough to give you a shock to find an Indian, in a rig that 's a cross between an Eskimo and a redman, who prefers the Arctic to Paris and London."

"Not much more astonishing than finding a young Englishman who prefers the same thing—a fellow who shaves every morning and talks of 'dinner' coats. I mean Ebeling," added Ned.

"And the factor, too, of course," suggested Alan. "Don't leave him off the list."

Bob ceased rowing, straightened up, shipped his oars, and extending his hand with spread out fingers, began to check off on them.

"Here 's the summary," he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Take your choice."

"No. 1, Leon Dufour, the Chesterfield of the Arctic, a quarter-breed Loucheux Indian, who flees from the restaurants of Paris to dine on musquash in the muskeg—"

"What 's that?" interrupted Alan. Bob ignored him, and went on.

"No. 2, H. M. Ebeling, the younger son of a titled Englishman, who prefers the society of Kog-mollyc belles on the McKenzie to the aristocratic dames of Mayfair."

Alan grunted in apparent disgust:

"Why do you reporters always make all young Englishmen you don't know about sons of the nobility? You talk of 'Mayfair' as if you knew about it—"

"No. 3," went on Bob, waving off the criticism with a smile, "Mr. Hayward, Hudson Bay Company factor, a half-century inhabitant of the north woods, who sees life as it is, and then some; partner of a mysterious 'him' that 's settin' up thar in a 'country God 's forgot,' and part owner of the richest copper mine in the world."

"No. 4," he concluded, catching up the oars again, "one general item including the secret ice caves of Nuliayok, supreme goddess of Beaufort Sea Eskimos, with the ivory and bone implements proper thereto, the fabled mines in the 'country God 's forgot,' and the secret o' the White Eskimos."

"You forget one important thing," said Ned, with a smile. "You have n't mentioned Ebeling's

promise to show Alan where he can get those silver fox skins."

"Dream on, you fellows," was Alan's somewhat scornful comment. "It 's better to be after something you know is on earth than always speculatin' on fairy tales."

"Why don't you try both?" laughed Ned. "That 's what makes life worth while. If I recall it correctly, you figured out that there could n't be such a thing as a ship buried in the ice—"

"Shut up," retorted Alan. "It happened to be true. But there was n't any excuse for it."

As the dingy drifted alongside the *Nvota*, Captain Lem Webster leaned over the rail.

"Did n't you youngsters hear me say I was plannin' to histe anchor to-morrer," he exclaimed with assumed gruffness. "Now, git busy an' stow yer ole airship some'eres, ur back she goes to Californy."

"We 'll be off by night," Ned assured him, laughing.

Scrambling over the *Yosemite's* decks, the boys reached the *Aleutian*. Colonel Oje, sitting in the open door of his cabin, had the deck before him littered with shooting paraphernalia.

"When you youngsters goin' to get that little

steamboat set up?" he exclaimed, squinting through the barrel of an express rifle.

"I guess we can't do much till day after tomorrow," answered Ned.

"Well, Partner," laughed the colonel, pointing his black cigar at Bob, "I 'm ready whenever you are."

Bob lingered a moment for the pleasure of a few words with the big game hunter. He and Colonel Oje had discussed this long anticipated hunt many a night. As a basis for their sport, they had always planned going up the McKenzie to where the Peel River entered the larger stream, and then up the Peel to Fort McPherson—the last Hudson Bay Company post on the river.

This was no day's outing. Like the Nile, the delta of the great McKenzie spread out, at its extreme northern end, a hundred miles between main shores. It was eighty miles from Herschel Island to these interlaced mouths; then came nearly two hundred miles of battures, sand bars and tangled channels. In places fifty miles wide, this maze of water and land finally narrowed, when the main river mouth was reached, into a six-mile-wide volume of yellow flood.

To reach Fort McPherson, boats coming down the McKenzie made their way westward through

the head of the delta to the Peel, and then up that stream thirty-three miles. Here, Black Mountain, two thousand feet high, towered above the black spruce, stunted birch, and tamarack. Round about and further west, between the flat delta and the rising Rockies, ranged the moose, black bear, red and silver fox and lynx. In its unnamed streams, swam the mink and the marten.

“But it ain’t fox and bear we ’re after, my boy,” the colonel would chuckle. “They ’ll do for a starter. It ’s caribou and wood buffalo. And, when things are right, it ’s to the east and the Barren Lands for the king of ’em all—the musk ox.”

In about a week Colonel Oje hoped to be at Fort McPherson. Then with guides, he planned to plunge into the wilderness. Bob assured him that, as soon as the aeroplane was cared for, he would urge the other boys to begin work on the portable steamer.

“I ’d start on it myself,” he explained, “only you know mechanics are n’t my long suit. And Ned and Alan have already figured it all out.”

The boys found Major Honeywell in Captain McKay’s company, watching the coaling. As they approached, Captain McKay looked at his watch.

"Oh, I know we 're late," laughed Ned; "but something turned up."

"Something 's always turning up with you boys," smiled Major Honeywell. "What is it now?"

"Tell you this evening," answered Ned. "Got to hurry now. But we were pickin' up information."

The mission of the boys was to lower the *Aleutian's* big whale boat. With the assistance of a couple of seamen, the boat was dropped. Scurrying about the steamer, Ned and Alan finally secured four short spars, material for stakes, and what extra rope they could find. These, with one of the tool chests, were stowed in the boat, and then the four sides of the canvas balloon house were dumped aboard. The blocks, tackles and cables with which these had been made fast to the yards when the balloon shed had been rigged up to shelter the gas bag of the now lost dirigible, were also deposited in the bobbing boat.

About ten o'clock, the freighted boat was off for the beach beneath the shelf selected for the aerodrome. Landing the cargo bid fair to be a problem. With only the boat bow on the smooth, rock beach, the boys saw that wet feet were probable. Then they discovered the smiling Ebeling

on the beach in charge of a dozen or more natives.

"We 've taken our wharf in to keep it dry," he remarked, with a grin. "These boys are not busy to-day. They 'll help you. But it 'll cost you 'passes' to the show."

A little later, when the boys saw the drenched Kognollyes lugging the heavy canvas, tools, spars, and blocks up the slope to the little plateau, Ebeling remarked:

"Don't you bother about their wet feet or wet boots. They 've all got wives. Their spouses 'll dry the boots to-night, an' gnaw 'em back into shape with their teeth in the mornin'."

"Gnaw 'em into shape?" said Bob, always keen for the extraordinary.

"An Eskimo don't pick out a wife by the color of her cheeks," went on Ebeling, "nor by the amount of tatoo in' on her chin. He asks his sweetheart to make him a pair of boots. When they 're done, he fills them with water. If a drop shows outside, she 's impossible as a wife. But that is n't all—he looks at her teeth. He don't care whether they 're pearly, but they 've got to be all there, and regular and sharp. His boots get soak-in' wet every day. At night, they dry out over the oil stove and get hard. Then comes a wife's real test. If she has n't got the teeth to chew stiff

skin soft again, she 's no good. She can take up her shinigbee and walk."

Just after the boys had fairly settled down to work, they held a conference, and Bob, using a couple of natives at the oars, was sent to the *Aleutian* for luncheon. He returned with a big pot of coffee for all, including Ebeling and the Eskimos, who had assisted in the debarkation. The remainder of the luncheon included fresh bread made by the *Aleutian's* cook. It was perhaps the first yeast bread ever eaten in Herschel Island.

At four o'clock, what looked like an open-top circus tent stood on the rear of the plateau near the cliff. Without pausing, the busy youngsters hurried at once to the *Nyota* to take off the aeroplane and appease Captain Webster. The veteran whaler showed his satisfaction for he had received strict orders from Major Honeywell to take on no coal while the delicate *White North* was aboard.

The airship occupied the deck just forward of the "try works", the brick furnace for rendering out whale oil. When taken aboard from the drifting ice floe, the aeroplane had been dismounted only so far as was necessary for easy handling. It had been made secure on the deck and protected

with spare sail canvas. This, after some weeks, was now removed.

Ebeling had accepted an invitation to be present at what Bob called the "unveiling". Captain Webster, glad to clear his deck at last—for the old whaler knew what delay means in the Arctic and what it means to fight the early September ice of Bering Straits—ordered down all his boats, while the crews gathered from the three vessels. Hardly a man in the one hundred and fifty or more who crowded deck, rails and the rigging of the *Nyota* and *Yosemite* knew the form of an aeroplane.

When the tarpaulin came off, they knew little more.

"Looks more like a bruk down circus 'an a bird," volunteered one greasy whaler.

The top and bottom planes of the aeroplane had been separated from the section uprights, and then disconnected in the middle. As the taut, rubberized silk covering was still in place, the four pieces, each about twenty-one feet long, resembled theatrical scenery. These parts were light in weight, but difficult to handle on account of their form. With an experienced oarsman in the stern of the largest whale boat to scull, and Alan in the bow to

superintend the unloading on the beach, these parts of the aeroplane made up the first load.

Into the second boat went the still set-up forward and rear rudders—bits of framework not nearly so graceful in appearance on the whale boat's gunwhales as when seen high in the air. Then, to a third boat was transferred a heavy load of smaller and more compact parts: the six-foot propellers, shafts, gear chains, rudder frames and levers, section uprights, and two boxes of bracing wires.

A few cans of gasoline had been carried, by this time, across the *Yosemite* from the *Aleutian*, and Ned got into a fourth boat with the heaviest part of the precious freight: the gasoline, engine oil, special tool box, gasoline tank, cooling coils, the engine magneto, the cabin electric warming coils, lights, and—carefully protected with canvas—the two engines and the light motor. One package, about which the young aviator seemed to be in doubt for a time, was finally put into the boat—the roll of aluminum painted felt that had enclosed the middle section of the *White North* to provide a wind- and cold-proof cabin.

As Ned's boat made its way slowly toward the beach, Ebeling and Major Honeywell darted alongside in the dingy.

“And that ’s what you call an aeroplane, is it?” said Ebeling to the major. “Did those boys figure that all out?”

“That and a good deal more,” answered the military man. “They probably have n’t told you, but those youngsters,” and he nodded toward Ned, “are known all over the United States as the ‘Airship Boys’. When we struck the ice a month ago, this was only a part of their outfit. This flying-machine was the car of a dirigible balloon. The balloon bag was abandoned up near the Pole when they lost their gas. But they ’ve got the aeroplane yet. They did n’t make it, but they planned it. And, if there is anything about flying-machines they don’t know, it ’s something I never heard of.”

CHAPTER VII

A DINNER PARTY AND ANOTHER IDEA

Although daylight would continue until nearly midnight, the boys quit work on the assembling of the *White North* in time for the usual seven o'clock dinner. During the day, Factor Hayward did not visit the new aerodrome. After Ebeling had visited the barracks, he explained the factor's singular absence by saying that Corporal Strakeleys and Engellard had induced the old man to go shooting in an effort to divert him and restore him to a mental equilibrium.

Ebeling also assured the boys that there was not the slightest reason to leave any one on guard at the aerodrome over night.

"A Kogmollyc will lie to you if he thinks it will please you," the young Englishman explained, "but he 'll never steal—not even from his fellow Eskimo. If a native finds a piece of wood that looks good to him—a log, say, over in the McKenzie—all he has to do it to put his pipe on it or some other personal trifle, and that log 's as good as in the safety vault. It 's his."

Major Honeywell returned to the steamer long before evening. When the working crew knocked off and set out with their guest, the policeman, it had grown decidedly cool. The sun was low on the horizon, and its level rays gave little warmth.

"What 's the coldest weather you 've ever experienced on the island?" asked Alan on the way to the steamer.

"Fifty-two below," was the answer. "Once the thermometer rose to sixty-four above."

"I reckon that 's some cold," commented Bob.

"It ain't the cold that bothers us—mostly," laughed the Englishman, "and it don't get as cold here as over on the mainland. Fifty below you can stand if you get into furs and moccasins or seal boots. Your breath don't begin to crackle till it 's colder than that. I 've shot moose at sixty below over on the river, and felt all right when I got indoors and warmed up. But the flies and mosquitoes! They 're what beat fifty below. You can't escape 'em day or night. They won't let you sleep and when a man can't sleep it is n't long till he 's worse off than being cold."

The joy with which Ebeling again took his place at a "white man's" table afforded pleasure to all. The Englishman, in spite of his flannel shirt and somewhat worn uniform coat, was plainly accus-

tomed to the best social forms. But his carefully kept nails and teeth, his clean shaven face and trimmed moustache were in strange contrast with his hair. This, although well brushed, lay on his neck in a ragged edge.

Once the smiling guest detected Alan apparently examining this contrast.

“A man has to learn a good many things when he ’s out of civilization—and he does. But there ’s one thing I ’ve never been able to do,” the guest said, addressing his observer good naturedly, “I could never cut my own hair. Dufour did this.”

In the laugh that greeted this confession prosaic Alan retorted:

“Talkin’ about Dufour; what about the Indian?”

“Yes,” spoke up Russell at once; “he ’s a curious character. Tell us about him.”

Ned was sure he saw Ebeling’s face flush a trifle. Then the Englishman, a good deal soberer than the boys had yet seen him, after hesitating a moment, said:

“About all I can say is that he ’s a fine fellow.” Then he repeated what he had already told Bob concerning Dufour’s parentage, how he had been taken abroad and how, apparently dissatisfied with civilization, he had returned to the woods.

“How did you happen to run across him?” persisted Alan.

“We were at the same school in England” answered Ebeling tersely and without volunteering more.

Ned was sure that he detected an embarrassment in their guest, and he began talking of the next day’s plans. In this the red-coated Englishman joined with alacrity, but at the first pause in the talk, the reporter returned to Dufour.

“Did n’t you say you came all the way over here from London to watch the Indian?”

“I believe I did,” responded the guest. Now there were unmistakable signs of embarrassment in Ebeling.

“That ’s funny,” continued Bob. Then even the persistent reporter detected what had long been apparent to Ned. But, before he could catch himself, he finished his question—“What did you mean?”

Ebeling’s smile came back instantly, but unquestionably it was forced.

“Really,” he said most politely, “it ’s so personal that I can’t flatter myself it would interest any one.”

Both Ned and Major Honeywell sprang into the breach at once, and subsequently they kept the con-

versation on general lines. Ned had meant to relate what had occurred in Hayward's cabin that morning, but somehow in view of what had just taken place, he said nothing about it. And, while Ebeling was engaged with the elder men, he managed to suggest to Alan and Bob that they say nothing.

As the meal progressed, Ebeling grew even brilliant. A shell of uncouthness seemed to break and fall away. From his rough and colloquial language, he begun to take on a pronounced English accent. He talked of the woods, the river and the people as if, to quote Bob later: "he were readin' out of a book or makin' newspaper copy". But not again during the evening did he mention his own past.

At last, Ebeling withdrew, borrowing the dingy to go ashore. It was not yet wholly dark and Ned accompanied the departing guest across the *Nvota* deck to where the boat had been left.

"You wanted to ask me something," said Ebeling, in a low voice as they reached the rail.

"I did," responded Ned, with a smile. "But I 've changed my mind."

The sinewy young policeman gave Ned a quick glance; then reached out his hand.

"I understand," he said in a low voice, "and I



NED WATCHED THE ENGLISHMAN PULLING THE
DINGY SHOREWARD.

thank you. Perhaps I 'll tell you, someday, without being asked. Good night."

As Ned watched the Englishman's muscled arms pulling the dingy shoreward, he shook his head. Then he muttered to himself:

"I did n't ask because it 's a cinch he don't want to tell. But what is the answer?"

In the dining-saloon, Ned found two embarrassed boys. Major Honeywell was attempting to placate them after having administered a little elderly advice.

"I know it," Bob was saying, "and I had the right hunch when we were at it. But, somehow, it did seem as if a man of his sort, who leaves all the rest of the world, is entitled to make some explanation. And, as he said, since he came to watch Dufour, why, that seemed the answer. I thought it was a fair question; but I acknowledge it was n't."

"Did n't get sore, did he?" asked Alan, turning toward Ned.

"Did n't mention it. Have you told about Mr. Hayward yet?" he went on, changing the subject. The discussion over the treatment of their guest had not permitted either Alan or Bob to bring the old factor's narrative to their elder's attention,

and before Ned could do so, the now decidedly aggressive Alan stopped him.

“Don’t it strike you as singular how Ebeling is knockin’ what Mr. Hayward told us? Seems funny to me that the man who don’t care to tell anything about himself should say a man who will talk is crazy for tellin’ about himself.”

“Maybe,” retorted Ned. “But Ebeling may have troubles of his own. And at that, he may not be crooked.”

“Has any one of you told him what *we* are here for?” interrupted Major Honeywell good naturedly.

The boys not only answered in the negative, but they knew what he meant.

“That ’s right,” exclaimed Alan, a little shamefacedly. “And he don’t seem to be worryin’ about us. I guess I was wrong.”

Ned stopped the discussion by taking up, at once, the interesting but somewhat rambling story that the old trader had told them. Both Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje listened closely, and at the close of the narrative, asked many questions. Then the older men talked together some time.

“It ’s just a question,” explained Colonel Oje, at last, “whether it is worth while to take any steps in the matter at once. We don’t attach much

importance to the opinion of those around Mr. Hayward. That is, it is no very convincing proof that he is suffering from a delusion because those living here think so."

"In other words," continued Major Honeywell, "if Mr. Osborne were here and we were prepared to start out looking for ore country, we would certainly feel warranted in interviewing Mr. Hayward. So long as he has not told just where his mine or mines are and so long as no one has disproved what he believes or says, it is n't fair to say he is a victim of a delusion."

"You mean you believe he may know what he 's talkin' about?" asked Ned excitedly.

Major Honeywell shook his head.

"We do not believe or disbelieve; we only know one thing—any talk on the subject excites Mr. Hayward. Until we are in a position to test his statement, it is n't even worth while to attempt to persuade him to talk."

"I would n't mention the thing to him again," suggested Colonel Oje. "When Mr. Osborne comes in the spring, he can do it. From what you say, I believe Hayward wants money. Mr. Osborne can decide whether it 's worth while."

That was the final agreement. Captain McKay had long since withdrawn, and Major Honeywell

and Colonel Oje now said good night. The three boys yawned their way to their stateroom study.

"Nothin' more doin' for me this day," drawled Alan, stumbling into the adjoining sleeping room. "Me for the 'hay'."

"You know," began Russell slowly as he jumped on the table and caught his knee in his clasped hands, "I almost think I have another idea."

Ned was too tired and sleepy to make a joke on the subject. But the reporter was far from sleepy. Ned yawned and smiled. Bob sprang from the table and caught his arm.

"Let the kid sleep," he exclaimed. "Come with me—out in the fresh air where we can think a bit."

"Won't it keep till morning?" sighed Ned.

"May be gone then," responded Bob.

"What won't keep till morning?" sleepily asked Alan, as he re-entered the room.

"Idea No. 2 in one day," exclaimed Bob. "I been thinkin' about it all evening. But it don't seem as good now as it did when it first percolated. It 's about the White Eskimos."

Even Alan could not resist that. A few minutes later, the three boys, each grabbing the first sweater he could find, were out on the deck gang-

way of the *Aleutian*. Without any special plan, they drifted to the vacant bridge. The world seemed asleep.

The wide deck expanse of the three vessels showed only a cabin light here and there. No riding lanterns were in the shrouds, and not even a watchman patrolled the silent decks. It was after eleven o'clock, and the sun had just disappeared below the horizon. A glow hung over it yet as of approaching dawn. Off to the north, big, black Herschel Island lay like a mountain shadow. The shore of the mainland was lost in the haze of the half night. But above, a tawny black sky was pierced with countless pale stars. A wind came out of the north, chilled by the unmelting ice of the Arctic.

For some moments, the boys, bunched together for warmth, hung over the rail, in silence.

"What do you really think about those White Eskimos?" chattered Bob, at last. "Do you take any stock in 'em?"

"As I understand it," answered Ned, "it 's only one of the many weird stories of the Arctic. Of course, it all comes from the Franklin Expedition."

"Yes, I know," responded the reporter. "We 've heard that often enough. How Sir John

Franklin was lost with two ships and one hundred and twenty-five men in 1850 over near Boothia Land. But do you believe it is possible that some of those white men escaped to the mainland and went to live with Eskimos?" he persisted.

"I don't know whether Major Honeywell believes they did," interrupted Alan, "but he says some folks do. He says it is n't impossible that some of those Franklin survivors married Eskimo women, and that there are yellow-haired children up here somewhere who talk English and who have never even seen white men."

"For the matter of that," added Ned, "if they are livin' with the natives, some of 'em might be alive now. Mighty young men went on those Arctic expeditions. A man twenty-five years old then would be about eighty-five now."

"That 's it," exclaimed Bob. "That 's the idea. Now, get your thinkers to workin'. Just run over what the old factor had to say: '*Him*, that 's my pardner. *Him* that 's settin' up thar waitin' fur me in that country God 's furgot'. Do you get me? Mean anything?"

"You ain't suggestin' that Mr. Hayward is a White Eskimo are you?" exclaimed Alan.

"I am not," answered Bob. "But who 's goin' to be waitin' for him anywhere in the Arctic, year

after year, but a native, *or some white man* a livin' with 'em? If you want to find where this wonderland of copper lies, you just locate the White Eskimos. Their 'secret' ain't the secret of *who they are*. It 's the secret of *what they know*."

The astounded boys had forgotten the chill night air.

"And how are you goin' to do that?" exclaimed Alan, at last.

It was now Ned 's turn to pound the frosty rail.

"Through Leon Dufour," he announced as if the answer were easy:-

"There," added Russell. "Now you have it. That 's my idea No. 2."

CHAPTER VIII

ABOVE THE ARCTIC OCEAN AGAIN

The *White North* aeroplane was a combination of the Wright Brothers, Farman and Curtiss machines. In the main, it resembled the former. Its novel feature was the use, for the first time, so far as known, of the gyroscopic motor. There were two of these, one mounted just beneath each propeller at the rear and on the far side of the sections adjoining the middle compartment.

These were four-cycle gasoline engines with cylinders that revolved instead of a crank shaft. They were expensive, costing twelve hundred dollars each, but the good judgment used in selecting them had been attested by the experience of the boys in the far North.

Being fixed to the car frame, much of their gyroscopic or balancing effect was lost; yet, in practice, this leveling tendency had been found to be most marked. In other ways, there was no question about their advantages as airship engines: there were no water jackets to freeze in the extreme cold, and the weight of radiator, fan,

and flywheel was eliminated—a no inconsiderable item in the make-up of an aeroplane.

Each of these engines weighed $97\frac{1}{4}$ pounds, and developed 36-horsepower, with a maximum of 1500 revolutions a minute. As two propellers were used, the engines were geared separately. In the Arctic, each engine had an auxiliary duty, one running a blower for inflating the balloonet in the bag of the big dirigible, and the other operating an electric motor that furnished current for lights and warming coils. But both these adjuncts were now a thousand miles or more away, abandoned on the ice.

The use of the two engines made a second operator always necessary, but this presented no embarrassment.

“We ’ll always have that many,” said Ned. “And we can carry as many more.”

This was because the machine had been planned with a maximum of lifting surface, a thing made necessary by the requirements of the polar cruise now just at an end. The aeroplane exceeded the ordinary Wright machine in all dimensions, the boys copying the dimensions of a Farman craft—a total width of 42.9 feet and a depth of planes of 6.5 feet.

“I suppose we won’t hear anything but aero-

plane from now on," said Bob as soon as he saw Ned and Alan in the morning. "White Eskimos can take a back seat, eh?" he asked.

"Don't you worry about that," responded Ned. "There are a lot of things we can do with this handy craft, and we 're goin' to try 'em all. You 're goin' to make a flight among other things."

Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I know it 'll fly. You don't have to 'demonstrate' for me. And I don't care for any circus stunts for the benefit of the natives. If you 're goin' anywhere I 'm on. I ain't afraid, if that 's what you 're gettin' at."

"Where would you like to be taken first?" spoke up Alan.

Bob jerked his head toward the Northeast.

"Nuliyok's ice caves," he answered promptly. "But that 's three hundred miles from here, they say."

"A day's outing," exclaimed Ned. "Nothing simpler. You get permission from the Major, and we 'll put you there and back between early coffee and late dinner."

"Pretty cocky," answered Bob, "but it 's a go, all right. Say," he added, "don't think this airship business is all you 've got to do. That steamer 's got to be rigged up before there 's any

'ice cave' excursions. And the Major wants the launch put in commission."

"I think we 'd better rig up the launch this morning," suggested Alan. "It 'll come in handy runnin' to and from the shore."

The boys breakfasted before Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje appeared. To their great satisfaction, Mr. Jackson said he would take an hour from his work on the broken shaft to assist with the launch. Instead of an hour, he took three, and it was ten o'clock before the stout, fast naphtha motor boat churned the water for the first time. Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje expressed a desire to visit the *White North* aerodrome, and as the new launch lunged through the bay, a murmur of approval arose.

"She 's just like that old bull walrus Colonel Oje plugged on the berg," exclaimed Bob; for, plowing through the water, heavily laden as she was, the new boat sent the spray from the parted swell in a sharp mist over the occupants.

"She has n't a name," suggested Major Honeywell. "That 's a good one, *Turark*—the walrus."

From that moment, the 12-knot craft was so known.

The two hours remaining before luncheon did not go a great way toward finishing the setting

up of the *White North*. But every one went enthusiastically ahead.

The big planes when joined in the center seemed almost airy enough to fly without power. When the section uprights had united the two surfaces into the long, fragile-looking skeleton of the aeroplane, the aerodrome began to fill. There were seven sections to the frame. The center one, or operating room, was 6.7 feet wide, while the three on each side were each 6.12 feet wide.

After some debate, it was decided to again enclose the central section with the aluminum covered felt. This, no doubt, operated somewhat against the efficiency of the aeroplane, but there was little August torridity about Herschel Island. In the air, it would certainly be cold enough to make travel uncomfortable. This enclosing felt left openings on each side through flaps, easily made fast, and permitted views forward and aft through large, round isinglass windows.

Since the engines were outside this section, the available operating space measured 6.18 feet wide, 6.7 feet high, and 6.5 feet deep. Herein the aviators must be accommodated, gasoline and supplies carried, and from it, the aeroplane must be controlled. The top and bottom planes were hinged to the front of the aeroplane. In the es-

cape from the pole, Ned and Alan has used these adjustable surfaces as sails to turn the aeroplane into an ice yacht.

This had been made possible by the adaptation of steel-shod runners to the bottom of the car instead of the usual landing skids. The two central runners were now serving as skids, but the two outer ones had been removed and abandoned on the Arctic ice with the gas bag, motor and blower when the Airship Boys made their polar flight. The adjustable plane surfaces were now, of course, bolted permanently into place.

“Go kind o’ hard with you kids, won’t it— —” laughed Bob, as the unassembled aeroplane began to take shape, “ridin’ around in a common everyday aeroplane after you dirigible-balloon-ice-yacht-flyin’-machine?”

“You can’t tell what ’ll happen,” answered Alan, smiling in turn. “Ned ’s apt to turn it into a submarine before he gets through.”

Ned did n’t do that exactly, but he almost turned it into a steeple climber a little later.

Ebeling appeared just before noon and, to the gratification of all, Mr. Hayward came with him. But Dufour did not show himself. The factor gave no sign of excitement. In fact, it was hard for the boys to believe that the curious old man had so

lately been the cause of any agitation. Captain Webster was anxious to be off for the straits and his coaling was far enough along to permit his departure that night.

"But," he exclaimed at noon, "if anybody thinks I kin histe anchor afore that airship goes up, their mistook. The crew won't stand for it. When 's the performance?"

There was yet much to do on the air craft for the alterations from the aero-sledge to a simple aeroplane involved many small and tedious changes.

"Make it ten o'clock to-morrow morning," suggested Ned. "We 'll certainly be ready for a flight by that time. Everybody 's welcome."

In fact, the Airship Boys were doing more than set up the old machine. They were using all their technical skill to increase the efficiency of the *White North*. The engine power of the craft, 72-horse, was double that of the ordinary aeroplane, and as the wing surface was 560 square yards (the spread of Farman's powerful machine) they were preparing to carry, in addition to themselves, if possible, two passengers and a supply of gasoline that would give a wider field of operation than ever before covered by an aeroplane.

Therefore, the two outer of the four sledging

skis having been removed, the vanadium steel shoes were taken off the others. The loss in weight of these steel strips just about compensated for the addition of the small bicycle wheels which were attached to the remaining skis to facilitate the starting of the craft. The propellers, almost exact copies of the Curtiss screws, were each 6 feet 2 inches in length, set on a pitch of 17 degrees, and geared to 1,200 revolutions a minute. The gasoline supply on the sledge had been 25 gallons, or about 150 pounds.

"But we 'll try," explained Ned, "when we have no passengers, to carry twice that amount. I think 300 pounds will give us a flight of 1,000 miles, or a radius of 500. That 'll do the 'ice caves'," he remarked to Bob, "and I think we can squeeze you in, too."

When the *Turark* made her last trip that evening, it was announced that the *White North* would positively ascend on time the next morning. And, that there might be no mistake concerning the welcome of every one, the three boys made a tour of the vessels that evening extending invitations to all—officers and men alike.

"What 's the program?" asked Major Honeywell, looking in on the boys in their library just before bedtime. "I 'm a little curious myself.

You know we folks on the *Aleutian* never saw the aeroplane fly. It was attached to the balloon when you sailed away from us."

Alan explained that the next day's flight would be only an exhibition, and that any of those desiring to do so, would be given a trip in the air. Later, he added, they thought of some excursions to the mainland—perhaps even to the somewhat distant Barren Lands.

"Could n't spy out my White Eskimos, could you," the major asked, smiling, "as you did the Treasure temple in the Tunit-Chas?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Ned. "At least, why not try? You can go with us."

"Not much," laughed the major. "Not at my age. But that reminds me. We do want the colonel's steamer. Get that ready, and then, while Mr. Russell and Colonel Oje are stalking musk ox, you boys can look for the blonde Eskimos."

Later in the evening, Ned was hanging over the table whereon as usual lay the big map of the Arctic shores of America.

"Do you know," he said after some moments of silence, "that, somehow, I believe whatever the Indian knows Ebeling knows. And, if Dufour knows about the White Eskimos, Ebeling knows it too."

"That makes it easy. Ask him," said Alan promptly.

"But you know he don't seem to be dying to tell all he knows. Maybe that 's one of the things he has up his sleeve he wants to keep mum about. And he may have a reason."

Alan grunted and Bob yawned.

"But there 's old Ilygobok," went on Ned. "Did n't Captain Campbell say he knew everything?"

Bob's yawn disappeared.

"Remember how I wormed out Mr. Osborne's secret?" he exclaimed, springing up.

The other boys laughed, recalling how the confident Bob had been so cleverly balked by their principal.

"That 's all right," went on the young reporter. "I nearly did. But Ilygobok is n't as used to reporters. Give me the assignment. I'll find out for you. 'See Chief Ilygobok and get good story on White Eskimos'," added Bob as if repeating his city editor's instructions. "You 're on, kids. I 'll deliver the goods in a day or so. That 's a go."

"I wonder if he can?" said Alan when he and Ned were in bed a little later.

"He 'll start something, any way," yawned

Ned. "Especially if the old man don't want to talk."

The hardest work the next morning was the smoothing and packing of the soil on the slope in front of the canvas aerodrome. But the busy feet of over a hundred curious, loud-talking sailors and whalemén helped materially. Just before ten o'clock, the front of the canvas airship house dropped and the marvelous craft was in view.

"All out of the way down there," rang out the managerial voice of Bob Russell, who was in charge of the business end of the show. "Look after your friends, Ebeling," he called to the young Englishman.

Ebeling and Strakeleys had their hands full. The Herschel Island people were determined to lose no part of the performance. But, finally, the starting incline was cleared of sailors and Eskimos, and a clear lane led down to the water.

"All ready, gentlemen," called out Ned, stepping to the head of the incline and lifting his cap to a group on the beach. Here, collected about a flotilla of small boats, sat or stood the *Aleutian* passengers, the captains of the boats in the harbor, Mr. Hayward, Engellard and most of the steamer engineers. Major Honeywell raised his cane in answer to the salute.

“Be sure everything is all right,” he called up the hill warningly.

Alan was already aboard. With a last, swift survey of the machine, Ned gave the word and both engines were put in motion. Then, springing on the framework and taking his stand at the levers, he waited for the propellers to gather momentum. Mr. Wales and Bob stood at the ends of the bird-like, trembling skeleton. In a few moments, the agitated car began to respond to the whirring propellers.

“Shove off!” exclaimed the waiting aviator. The two assistants moved quickly forward, the aeroplane moved on its wheels, struck the incline, dashed forward on the slope, and then, as the big rudder flew up, the frame leaped into the air. The *White North* aeroplane was afloat over the Arctic Ocean at last.

CHAPTER IX

BELLE OF BEAUFORT

An ascending aeroplane mounts highest in the shortest distance by following a spiral course.

“We ’re over the water,” exclaimed Alan, as the *White North* darted from the incline. “Go directly up. Give ’em a show.”

In the spirit of this suggestion, Ned threw over the vertical rudder and sharply elevated the forward guide planes. The airship began turning like a shaving spinning in the air. Although at last it slowed up, as a man pauses in climbing a hill, the car, as if swinging at the end of a cord, rose rapidly with each revolution. The spectators cheered and waved their arms.

“I ’ve got enough,” said Alan at last when the world below seemed contracting into a photograph. “It ’s a thousand feet.”

Ned, without reply, held to the spiral, upward course. Alan sat silently watching the engines and the aneroid barometer, which hung always on one of the forward section posts.

“Well,” he added at last, “it ’s two thousand feet now, if that ’s what you ’re after.”

“Tell me when it ’s three thousand,” answered Ned nonchalantly. “I thought we ’d take a bird’s-eye view now that we ’re here.”

“Goin’ down by the same route?” asked Alan, also assuming indifference.

Ned did n’t chuckle, for he was n’t indifferent to the risk he was taking. But it was a sound something like it.

“Do you remember what Octave Chanute says about flying?” he asked, at last.

“I don’t recall that he said it was any safer to operate an aeroplane at three thousand feet in the air than within’ jumpin’ distance of the ground.”

“But he did say any man could fly with only a pair of wings if he just thought so—that is if he went up high enough before he jumped.”

“What ’d you mean?” snapped Alan, trying not to show undue alarm.

“He says a man could fly as easily as a bird if he only thought so. That is, if he had the courage, a man with a pair of gliders could jump out of a balloon a mile up in the air and float gracefully to the ground. Are you afraid to try it?”

“Try what?”

"Making a jump of it to the ground—shut off our engines and drift down guided by our rudders and gravity."

"I reckon I 'm not afraid of anything *you* can stand for," said Alan with a suppressed groan. "And, anyway, if it don't work, it won't hurt. We won't know anything when we light."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ned, with more cheeriness, "the operators working the Montgomery gliders out in California have dropped four thousand feet, turned completely over and landed right side up, after traveling eight miles of slants and circles."

For a long time, Alan said nothing. The aeroplane sensation was now wholly gone. It was as if they were in the dirigible balloon. All objects below had gathered as if in the center of a giant bowl. The island had begun to lose itself in the waste of Arctic water. To the south, the endless gray-green wilderness of trees rose toward the horizon as if climbing an unseen mountain range. The boys were directly over the center of the bay.

"Three thousand feet," remarked Alan coldly.

Throwing down the forward rudder, the climbing car came at once on an even keel, then, as it began to move swiftly forward, the boy at the

levers gave the horizontal guides a slight depression.

"Shut off the engines," he shouted.

With one motion, Alan stopped both whirring motors. For a few seconds, the propellers continued their 1200-revolution flight. Then, slowly, their speed fell off. But the car, already on its long downward sweep, did not slacken. With his face set, Ned's hands gripped the two levers. Twice only in the dash toward the bay did he change the course of the flying air craft. And each time, as if to check the gathering momentum; he threw up the forward guide until the car, like a boat caught by a rising wave, checked itself only to plunge forward on a new flight.

In less than a minute, and without the exchange of a word between the two boys, the *White North*, with one long, final sweep settled on the edge of the aerodrome plateau like a heavy, tired bird.

"Are you satisfied?" exclaimed Alan as he leaped from the car.

"We had to try it some time," responded Ned, with a smile.

"Never again," answered Alan hotly. "Not with me."

The excitement of those watching this daring experiment surprised the young aviators. The

Eskimos made little demonstration, but the sailors did not restrain themselves. Having landed and turned the aeroplane for another flight, the boys made every effort to induce Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje to undertake an excursion. But both refused, as did Captain McKay.

"A cro' nest 'll be high enough for me," the latter insisted.

But before noon, Bob, Ebeling, Captain Webster and Mr. Jackson, of the *Aleutian*, had been given flights out over the water.

"By the way," said Alan to Ebeling, as the daring young aviators were circling the young Englishman about over a corner of the island, "where's your friend Dufour, the Indian? He seems to be the only person on the island who is n't curious about the aeroplane."

"He don't know anything about it," answered Ebeling. "He left for Fort McPherson the night you came."

"Comin' back?" asked Ned, with assumed indifference.

"Not for some time," said the policeman. "He hunts sometimes for the people at the post. That's how he lives."

"I 'm sorry," exclaimed Ned; "and Russell

will be sorrier. We all thought a good deal of Dufour. Wanted to know him."

"He 's worth knowing," answered Ebeling sentimentously. And with that the subject dropped.

At noon, the exhibition came to an end. The *White North* was housed, the aerodrome closed and the spectators dispersed. Mr. Hayward repeated Ebeling's assurance that no guard was necessary and the last trip of the *Turark* carried the three boys back to the steamer.

"Bob," said Ned, "your Indian has gone. Dufour has left the island. He 's off for Fort McPherson. Left the day we came."

Russell made no reply for some moments. Then he said:

"Ebeling sent him. You can bet your boots on that."

When the other boys looked up wonderingly, he added:

"And it won't do the Englishman the least good. That 's where Colonel Oje and I are going. I 'll land Dufour yet, don't forget that."

This day was August fifth. Immediately after luncheon, a new activity arose on the *Aleutian*. The long crated little wood burning steamer was being prepared for service. Yet this was hardly begun before another delay ensued. Every one

stopped to add the last postscripts to letters that the *Nvota* was to carry home. All the business relating to the ivory cargo had already been arranged. That portion of the treasure belonging to Captain McKay, the Russian Zenzencoff, Ned, Alan, and Bob was to be stored in a warehouse and for this, the boys held Captain Webster's receipts. At four o'clock, the *Nvota* steamed out of the cove, and at the dinner hour not even her smoke was visible on the western horizon.

With no ways from which to launch the steel hull of the little steamer, the plates were bolted together on the deck of the *Aleutian*, and just before noon the next day, the steam derrick on the *Yosemite* alongside lifted the flat shell into the water. Next came the boiler which was drawn from the hold of the *Aleutian* with the aid of the donkey engine. Later that day, the three boys were busy with the wooden superstructure, while Mr. Jackson put the final touches on the engine and the fly-wheel.

Propulsion was by a wooden stern wheel resembling that of a shallow river steamer. This was operated by a heavy, double-chain gear. Aft the engine and boiler, one cabin was set up—galley, dining and sleeping room; forward, a miniature pilot house arose on steel standards which

were bolted to the sides of the hull, leaving all clear beneath for fuel—wood to be chopped along the river. From the pilot house, a skeleton gangway extended aft over the engine and boiler to the roof of the cabin. The top of the latter was enclosed with a rail and, at the stern, steps led to the deck. Rungs on two of the metal standards forward made a ladder leading to the pilot house.

The final setting up of the steamer required almost another day. The equipment of the cabin was more elaborate than the boys had expected.

“I don’t know that I care so much about aeroplanes, anyway,” remarked Russell, looking around the cabin while the last touches were being put on it. Ned and Alan could n’t honestly say they did not envy him his coming cruise. Four berths folded against the walls with swinging racks from the roof to carry mattresses and bed clothes. The two sections of a table large enough to accommodate six persons were carried in racks just outside a door in the stern. A small, wood burning cook stove occupied one forward corner of the cabin, and a cupboard filled with aluminum dishes and cooking utensils the other.

A door in the forward end of the cabin led to the engine compartment. To the left of this, was a small lavatory and to the right a large closet or

storeroom for supplies. Next the engine were four hammock berths of canvas lashed to metal posts—quarters for the crew. A canvas curtain hung forward of the boiler to be dropped in rough weather. In the pilot house, in addition to bell and whistle cords, there were signal wires leading directly to the engine room, and a leather case holding a set of five Canadian maps covering the northland of America from Winnipeg to the Arctic.

There had not been the slightest debate over the name Bob selected for the new steamer.

"She 's so much like a Mississippi steamer," he said, at once, "that she 's got to have a river name. We 're just out of Beaufort Sea. What 's the matter with 'Belle of Beaufort'?" And that was the last work done on the sturdy looking new craft—the inscribing of her name on the front of the wheel house in bold letters of blue—"Belle of Beaufort".

On the morning of August eighth steam was raised in the *Belle* and every one went ashore in the sputtering little craft. There a reception was held.

"Who 's going to pilot her?" asked Ebeling. "You 'll have to take a native through the delta, at least."

“Where ’s that fellow Dufour?” exclaimed Colonel Oje. “He ought to make a first-class pilot.”

Ebeling explained that the quarter-breed had already gone up the river to the post, but that he could furnish any number of natives who could show the way if they could n’t pilot the boat. It had already been arranged that Yoshina was to accompany the river party as cook and all-round servant. But, as for engineers, every one in that line on the two steamers was busy on the broken shaft, which piece of work was yet unfinished. The trial trip of the boat, its compact, comfortable quarters, and the natty, snug little pilot house were too much for Ned and Alan.

“Look here, Colonel Oje,” said Ned in a low voice, as the *Belle* swung up to the landing ladder on her return to the *Aleutian*. “Did you see how Alan made that landing?” Colonel Oje smiled. “And did you see how Bob and I kept her boilers ready for business?” The Colonel smiled again. “Well, airships are all right by spells, but—well, Alan and I *could* go along in a pinch. And if we did, I ’ll bet the three of us could run her like a mouse.”

“Certainly,” laughed the colonel, “I ’ve never counted on anything else. And now I ’ll tell you a

little secret. Major Honeywell is going with us too—quite a family party, eh?”

“And at McPherson we ’ll pick up Dufour as a guide,” added Ned jubilantly. “Then it ’s ho for up the river and the Barren Lands.”

“And how about the *White North*?” said the colonel laughing.

“She ’ll keep,” exclaimed Ned, “Ebeling will watch her for us.”

The excitement and jollification over this altered program lasted into the dinner hour.

“I thought you youngsters were so anxious to explore the Goddess What’s-her-name’s ice caves?” commented Major Honeywell good naturedly during the meal.

“We were, and are,” explained Alan, a little embarrassed; “but we had n’t seen the *Belle of Beaufort* then.”

“Nor that cabin, and pilot house,” added Ned.

“That brings everything around in fine shape,” remarked Bob. “I suppose no one remembers the toast I proposed when we sighted Herschel Island. Well, here it is again: ‘Three cheers for the White Eskimos’ secret, whatever it is.’ ”

A little later Ned whispered to Bob:

“I thought you were goin’ to get that White Eskimo secret from old Ilygobok.”

“What ’s the use?” whispered Bob, in turn. “We ’re goin’ to pick up Leon Dufour at Mc Pherson. He knows. We ’ll worm it out of him.”

Colonel Oje was in the height of spirits, no doubt glad enough to keep his friends together and probably enthused over the near approach of his long anticipated musk ox hunt.

“I join in the cheers, all right,” he exclaimed, laughing, “but I just don’t see the connection between steaming up the McKenzie and finding a tribe of Eskimos—white or brown.”

“You ’re not expecting to shoot big game from the deck of the *Belle*, are you?” answered Bob promptly.

“I suppose we ’ll be going up tributaries or into the lakes and making foot journeys,” answered the colonel.

“That ’s it,” broke in Ned. “We ’re going to carry Major Honeywell just as close to the real Barren Lands as the *Belle* will go on rivers, lakes, creeks or the dew. While you are chasin’ caribou, we ’ll chase our myth. If we miss it, we ’ll have had the fun of trying.”

CHAPTER X

OFF FOR THE MCKENZIE

The equipment of the *Belle of Beaufort* included not only ample provisions but a camp outfit. As there were no horses on the lower McKenzie and sledging was impossible because of the season, the tents and traveling mess kits were selected from the stock on the *Aleutian* with considerable care. Colonel Oje carried three guns of different calibre, and each boy selected one ordinary magazine rifle in addition to the usual automatic revolver.

The exact date of departure had been fixed for eight A. M., August tenth, the plan being to return in three weeks. To the point where the tortuous delta of the big river began, was eighty miles. That far, progress would be simple enough. To cover the remaining miles between the extreme mouth of the river and the point where the Peel and McKenzie Rivers came together to make the head of the lake-like delta, was not so easy. Therefore, a Nunatalmute Eskimo known as Nana-sook-tok was engaged as consulting pilot.

Where the wide mouth of the McKenzie narrowed down to the main channel at Point Resolution, the little steamer would turn westward, enter the Peel, and after another thirty-mile struggle up stream would reach Fort McPherson. Here, if the Indian Dufour could be secured, the Eskimo pilot would be released, to await the return of the voyagers.

The evening before the departure, Ned, Alan and Bob made a trip ashore. It seemed right to take farewell of the factor, Mr. Hayward. He was advised as to the expedition and in turn talked freely about it. Mainly, he cautioned the hunters against an inland excursion unless accompanied by guides, and explained that the return of bad weather, temporary at least, might be expected at any time after the end of August.

At last, farewells were said to Ebeling, Mr. Hayward and the other white men, and the launch was headed for the steamer.

"I suppose you heard me asking if old Ilygobok could make himself understood in English," remarked Bob.

"I did," answered Ned. "Of course, you had a sort of eleventh hour idea about going to see him concerning the White Eskimos."

"Why did n't you?" asked Alan. "Hayward and Ebeling can both talk Kogmollyc."

"That 's a fine question," retorted Bob. "Were n't we told to say nothing to Mr. Hayward that might start him goin' again."

"There was Ebeling," persisted Alan. "Why did n't you ask him to help you out?"

"That would certainly have queered us. I tell you there 's a big mystery here. Both Hayward and Ebeling are in it, and it 's plain they are not sitting up nights to tell about it. If we ever find out what it is, we 've got to work it out ourselves."

"And you 're going to do it through the Indian Dufour?" suggested Ned laughing. "In *my* judgment, you won't find him any easier than the others."

"You mystery makers are gettin' tiresome," broke in Alan. "Cut out mystery a little while. Are n't you satisfied with what you know we 've got ahead—the big, unexplored, boundless wonderland of America? Think of the *Belle* and the trip up the river, and the big game waitin' for us."

"Including silver foxes at two thousand dollars a pelt," laughed Bob.

"I 'm not satisfied with that if you are," added

Ned seriously. "That 's all play—it is n't what the *Aleutian* came up here for. If Mr. Osborne were here, we 'd have other work cut out for us. He knows there is something beyond big game over there in that wilderness. And if I can put him in the way of locating what he 's looking for, I 'm going to do it."

The final "council of war" was held that evening. At the last moment, two members of the *Aleutian's* crew were added to the crew of the *Belle of Beaufort*. It was a little disappointing to the ambitious boys, but they could only agree that it was a wise step. Zenzencoff, the Russian wheelman, was selected to take charge of the *Belle's* pilot house, and Webster, the carpenter, jumped at the chance to help in the engine room. Ned and Alan were left practically in charge of the engine; that was some satisfaction. Bob had to make the best of his assignment—"historian, official photographer and general business representative."

The following morning broke un auspiciously. The wind had risen in the night, and was blowing on shore. A murky haze hung over the bay, and the thermometer was just above freezing. As soon as Zenzencoff had a look out beyond the sheltered bay, he insisted that a couple of small boats and several life preservers be added to the

equipment of the not specially seaworthy little flat-bottom steamer. There being only large boats on the *Aleutian*, Captain McKay suggested the purchase of lighter boats on the island.

The launch was made ready, and the three boys again went ashore. Here Ebeling was appealed to, and with his assistance, two Indian bark canoes were bought. Again, the boys took farewell of their shore friends, and, according to program, at eight o'clock, the *Belle* cast off on her eventful voyage. Ebeling had followed the launch in an Eskimo kayak, and, with all the skill of a native his little skin boat trailed after the puffing steamer well out into the bay.

Then were three cheers from the officers and crew of the two steamers—even the dipping of the *Aleutian's* colors—but the last greeting came from the smiling young Englishman in the bobbing kayak. At the last moment, removing his pipe with one hand and raising his double-bladed paddle in the other, his clean-shaven face aglow with enthusiasm, Ebeling shouted, "*Bon voyage.*"

Zenzencoff headed directly shoreward and for nearly an hour, kept well in the lee of the big island. But, as the breakers began to show ahead, and the *Belle* altered her course to the east, the Arctic swell began to roll the little steamer. As

time passed those aboard thought less and less of those left behind. In time, the spray falling over the open bow began to sober the voyagers in the cabin and the engine room. Watching Zenzencoff and Man-a-sook-tok in the swaying pilot house, the boys saw the Eskimo point seaward and a spell of relief came when the Russian brought the wheel over and headed the shallow craft well up into the swell.

Then for two hours or more, the untried but apparently strong little vessel plunged into the short waves. Plenty of spray still showered those forward, but the canvas engine room curtain was dropped and the engine crew devoted themselves to their appointed task. By noon, the *Belle* was well out of sight of land, and Herschel Island peaks were below the horizon.

In spite of the chilling spray, the creaking of the steamer and the constant shifting of cargo, Yoshina prepared luncheon; but there was not much joviality over the meal. Zenzencoff seemed neither alarmed nor reassured. It was all one to the seasoned whaler. After luncheon, he personally superintended the rearranging of the stern furniture.

“We ’ll be comin’ about now, shortly,” he explained, “afore we hit the river current. An’ we may ship a bit o’ water astarn. But it ’s better there than for’ard.”

About mid-afternoon, just as the great brown current of the mighty river could be made out ahead, the *Belle* altered her course once more. She was now headed directly for the west pass of the river with hope to make it about ten o'clock in the evening.

The first slap of the sea on the wooden wheel of the *Belle* threw the steamer's nose into the air, sent the engine room crew plunging into the hammock frames and, in the cabin deposited most of Yoshina's kitchen ware against the rear door. As Ned crawled to the curtain and looked out, he saw Zenzencoff hastening along the little bridge toward the cabin roof and stern. With an impulse to follow, he remembered his duty, and sprang back to the engine to await orders. In the lunge forward, there had been an alarming crash.

In a few moments, the Russian stuck his head into the engine room.

"I was a feared o' that new fangled wheel," he explained. "She had a jolt. Make it half speed."

As the wheelman hurried up the ladder into the pilot house again, Alan exclaimed:

"I guess the paddles hit the waves each time the wheel turns. I wonder why he don't stop her."

"Can't," explained Ned. "We 'd fall into the

trough of the sea driftin'. Got to keep some headway.'"

Her wheel at half speed, the *Belle of Beaufort* mounted and sank into the swells for several hours. With each long, stomach-disturbing dip, the water rolled over the stern until, in time, running forward on the cabin gangways, there were several inches of it in the engine and fuel compartment. Bob and Yoshina were set to work baling. Alan attended the boiler, and Ned, perched on a little pile of wood, crouched over the engine valves. Webster watched the wheel from the cabin window.

It was seven o'clock and the sun was so low that even in the engine room the boys began to suffer from the cold. Sticking his head beyond the protecting curtain, Bob suddenly shouted:

"Say, we 're runnin' into somethin' dead ahead—"

"I guess not," exclaimed Ned. "You let Zenzenhoff run the boat and keep on balin'."

Bob scowled, but returned to his task.

"What 's it look like?" whispered Alan.

"None o' my business. I 'm only a deck hand," growled Bob.

In truth, all the boys were cold and nervous.

"I only meant you must n't get scared," ex-

plained Ned, trying to smile. "What *did* it look like?"

"Looked like a mountain to me," explained Bob, at last, "but I reckon it 's a little island—"

"We must be behind it," exclaimed Alan, for at that moment the straining, tumbling, wave-drenched steamer heeled over as if changing her course, and immediately ran into smooth water.

"Clang, clang," rang the stop signal, and Ned, long waiting at his post, responded as if working automatically.

Throwing the curtain aside, the boys rushed into the open bow. The *Belle* was drifting slowly ahead into a little harbor in the lee of a treeless heap of sea-packed sand—one of the many islands grouped in the mouth of the McKenzie. On the smooth beach, vague in the foggy haze which yet hung over the sea, could be made out four men. Behind them, rose the smoke of a big, driftwood fire.

Zenzencoff was already on the bridge leading to the cabin. Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje, both rather pale and dispirited in looks, had hastened to the deck astern. The boys joined them.

"The Eskimo makes signs that we may as well tie up here for the night," explained Zenzencoff. "There is n't any more danger, but it 's a long

pull up the channel, and we 'll do it by daylight."

"Besides," said Major Honeywell, with apparent relief, "I see we have company over there," and he pointed to the beach. "I 'm willing to rest a bit."

The *Belle* carried no anchor, and it was agreed to make in shore, and tie up if possible to one of the mountain-like heaps of driftwood.

"If those fellows want to meet us, they can come to us," suggested Colonel Oje, raising his hat and waving it toward the beach. The men there made no demonstration, but as Zenzencoff ordered half speed ahead again, those watching from the steamer saw three of the strangers launching a large canoe. A moment later, it was shooting through the water impelled by the sweep of Indian paddles. In the stern, sat a third man, while the fourth remained motionless on the beach.

When it was plain that those approaching desired to speak or come aboard the steamer, Major Honeywell signaled Zenzencoff and again the engine was stopped. All on the steamer crowded forward admiring the graceful ease and power of the paddlers. The man in the stern was not an Indian; nor did he appear to be a river man.

With quick sweeps the canoe shot ahead, and then, out of the chilling fog rounded to come along-

side. The man in the stern did not move. Nor did he speak until the two Indians sank their paddles into the water and the fragile craft stopped alongside as if blocked.

“Major Honeywell, I believe,” exclaimed the stranger suddenly but without moving.

In another instant ten eager hands shot over the steamer’s side to grasp those of the stranger. At least three stentorian yells sounded like rifle shots in the cold, foggy air, and Ned, turning toward the pilot house where the curious Zenzencoff was hanging out of the window, yelled:

“It ’s Mr. Osborne! Hurrah! It ’s Mr. Osborne, Zenzencoff!”

What followed in the next few moments, was little short of pandemonium. Explanations were not attempted. It was as if father and son or brother and brother had met after years of separation. Even the austere Mr. Osborne made no attempt to restrain himself. It was handshake and repeat; laughter, exclamation and shout. How J. W. Osborne, of Boston, dignified millionaire, happened to be standing on the bleak shore of a fog-ridden Arctic island seemed of no moment. Nor was there even time for this man of mystery to ask how his old friends happened upon those stormy waters in their cockle shell craft.

Mr. Osborne's first connected words were:

"Colonel Oje, have you a decent cigar?"

It was like old times in the main cabin of the *Aleutian* to see the precise man of affairs politely accept and ceremoniously light the fragrant weed. Then his eye fell on the grinning Yoshina, and Mr. Osborne's glow of satisfaction over the first whiffs of his cigar broke into a smile.

"Yoshina," he exclaimed, "this completes the pleasure of my most fortunate accident. Has dinner been served? I have not had a cup of real coffee in six weeks."

That was enough for the proud Japanese. With the responsibility of that reunion dinner on him, Yoshina rushed to his culinary duties. Ned could restrain himself no longer.

"Mr. Osborne," he exclaimed, "did you win out? Did you beat Mr. Hayes back to Seattle?"

The millionaire drew deeply on his cigar and then smiled. As he shook his head, without a trace of disappointment or irritation, he answered:

"I did not." Then he almost laughed. "It was provoking after the start I had. I did n't even give him a good race. I was beaten at every point."

CHAPTER XI

AN OLD FRIEND REAPPEARS

Although at fever heat to hear the causes of Mr. Osborne's failure to circumvent his business rival, the *Aleutian* adventurers had to restrain themselves. Mr. Osborne's surprise at meeting the travelers was little compared to his eagerness to hear the story of the *Aleutian's* voyage.

Suddenly, every one realized how much there was to tell; the trip from Unalaska to St. Michael, the delay at the Diomed Islands waiting for the straits to open, the long search through Bering Sea for an eastern channel, the besetting in the ice, the broken shaft, the exploits of Ned and Alan in the *White North*, the storm-driven flight to the pole, the escape in the aero-sledge, the discovery of the treasure ship in the ice, the rescue by Captain Webster on the *Nvota* and what had happened at Herschel Island.

This long story was related by first one and then the other, Ned and Alan doing, perhaps, the least of the talking. During this medley of explanation, Yoshina was busy. The *Belle* was now

safely moored at a jam of driftwood, and all but Zenzencoff and Webster were crowded into the cabin where the roaring cook stove was giving out both grateful warmth and odorous evidences of the dinner to come.

When the talk finished with the account of the program of the *Belle of Beaufort's* voyage, Mr. Osborne, whose old austerity had wholly disappeared in evident enthusiasm over the turn of affairs, at once knit his brows in assumed perplexity. Then he looked about the rather crowded little cabin.

"So you are all off on a shoot, eh? Good. I presume I 'd better proceed on my voyage, although," and he shrugged his shoulders, "I can truthfully say I have nearly all of the McKenzie I care for just at present."

"You 've got to go on with us, or we 'll return," exclaimed Colonel Oje, at once.

"By no means," insisted Mr. Osborne. "Although," and again he shrugged his shoulders, "I don't at all relish the prospect of a sea trip in an Indian canoe. We were waiting for better weather."

"We will all go back," interrupted Major Honeywell. "As a matter of fact, this excursion was planned only because you were not here. Now

that you have come, we are all subject to orders. No doubt you have plans—”

Mr. Osborne was silent a moment.

“Our meeting is so sudden that it rather upsets me. Of course, I had plans which involved getting to the *Aleutian* as soon as possible. But I did not count on the good fortune of meeting the—what do you call it?”

“*Belle of Beaufort*,” answered Bob promptly and proudly.

“*The Belle of Beaufort*,” went on Mr. Osborne. “From what I ’ve seen of her, she may fit in very well with my plans. Let me think a bit. Wait till I ’ve related my experience. Then we ’ll hold a council of war.”

“Yes,” broke in Ned, who had far more interest in Mr. Osborne’s story than in Bod’s elaborate account of what he and Alan had done in the airship and aeroplane. “Tell us what happened.”

“It was all so commonplace, compared with finding poles and ice entombed treasure,” answered Mr. Osborne, with his old, polite smile, “that I really believe it ’s going to require a cup of Yoshina’s *cafe noir* to give it piquancy. A little later,” he added. “Meanwhile, won’t some one see to the fourth member of my party? We were going to camp ashore till morning.”

The three boys at once rushed out into the now gathering dusk. It was well after eight o'clock and the wind and sea had fallen. The sun—a big, dull red ball—circling on the horizon, seemed to give no warmth. The fire that had marked Mr. Osborne's beach camp was still burning some distance down the island shore. Discovering that the man left on the beach had not followed the *Belle* to her moorings, the boys sprang on the driftwood and thence to the sand. With common boyish impulse, they set out on a race to the fire.

As the panting, shouting youngsters brought up with gasps almost on top of the well arranged fire, they were a little surprised to see no one. In the gloom, the flare of the fire seemed to erect a wall of night. Ned turned to the shelving beach. There, well up from the water rested a beautifully **f**ormed canoe. In the stern and bow were compact parcels, neatly arranged, while on cross-pieces lay a rifle and paddle.

“He 's here somewhere,” panted Alan.

“Over here,” exclaimed a voice out of the dark on the far side of the fire.

The boys rushed forward. Slowly rising from a log of driftwood the figure of an Indian came into view.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” added the man.
“Can I serve you in any way?”

“Leon Dufour,” gasped Bob.

The quarter-breed nodded and smiled. The excited boys fell on him in greeting as if he were a long lost friend. His part of the story was soon told. On his way to Fort McPherson, he had, the morning before, met Mr. Osborne and his two Indians well up the delta channel. As is the habit of strangers in the wilderness, the passing boats stopped to exchange news.

“When Mr. Osborne learned that I was from the island, and that the *Aleutian* had reached the harbor, he insisted that I keep him company for a few hours,” explained Dufour. “Naturally, he was most curious. The few hours grew into a day. I camped with your friend last night. Days count for little here,” continued Dufour. “The weather did not look good to me to-day. Mr. Osborne’s men are of my race. I came with them to the island to be sure they acted wisely about putting to sea.”

“And now,” exclaimed Bob, “what are you goin’ to do?”

“I shall eat and sleep and at sunrise, set out for the island again. I shall not go up the river now.”

"I 'll bet you don't," added Bob. "You 're goin' to come with us. Ain't he boys?"

Before they could answer, Dufour smiled.

"That will be as Mr. Osborne says—perhaps."

"Well, anyway," put in Alan, "he 's sent us to bring you."

"Very good," answered the red man, "I 'll follow—in the canoe."

When the boys reached the *Belle* it was ablaze with lights, and the quarter-breed was in the engine room where Zenzencoff and Webster had a big fire roaring in the open boiler. Yoshina's culinary capacity was taxed that evening. Colonel Oje's simple hunting trip had at last grown to include twelve persons. There were no ticklish ideas of racial precedence on the *Belle*, but, as it was impossible that all should eat in the cabin, Major Honeywell divided the party into two squads.

Mr. Osborne's two Loucheux canoe men, Nan-a-sook-tok, Webster the carpenter, Zenzencoff and Ned were served in the engine room on an improvised table. This was Ned's suggestion.

"You can't put Dufour there," he whispered. "He 's practically Mr. Osborne's guest. He came two days' travel with him as an unpaid escort."

In that manner, the dinner proceeded, Bob and

Alan acting as waiters. There was no dallying over the coffee in the engine room, and as soon as Ned appeared in the cabin, the quarter-breed arose.

"Gentlemen," he said in a low voice and in his usual good English, "I am greatly indebted to you for this entertainment. It has been a real pleasure to me to be with you again." Turning to Mr. Osborne, he smiled in a way that showed some of the wealthy manufacturer's occasional condescension. "My service to you, sir, has been trifling. Your return—the two days I have enjoyed in your company—has been a great pleasure to me. Good bye," he concluded moving toward the door.

"You ain't leavin'?" exclaimed Bob.

Mr. Osborne raised his hand in protest.

"Not to-night?" said Mr. Osborne. As Dufour smiled again and inclined his head, the merchant continued, "I hope you will put off your departure until I can see you again."

"As you like," answered Dufour. "I shall sleep in the camp on the beach."

The possibility of losing Dufour as a guide had alarmed most of the hunting party, but the unanswered question as to whether they were going on or back had stopped Ned's suggestion that the Indian be hired offhand.

The boys assisted Yoshina at his after-dinner duties, and finally the old *Aleutian* adventurers, minus Captain McKay, were by themselves once more, but it was nearly ten o'clock.

"There ought to be some maps aboard," suggested Mr. Osborne, when he was ready to tell his story. These were hastily procured from the wheelhouse, and laid on the table.

"I suppose," began Mr. Osborne, who was enjoying Colonel Oje's long preserved cigars, "that you are all wondering what I am doing up here. If Mr. Hayes outwitted me, it 's just because I don't always know when I 'm finally licked. In fact," and he leaned back to exhale the smoke of his cigar, "I 'm in a new race with him. I—but here 's the story first."

Mr. Osborne did not look like a river voyageur—nor was he costumed like an explorer. His neatly turned up trousers revealed a trim pair of tan shoes, and he wore a soft, gray traveling hat. Otherwise he was dressed as if on his way to his office, except as to the white flannel shirt. His scarf and pin, his narrow watch chain on his well-fitting waistcoat, street gloves and his always present nose glasses, were in marked contrast to the pronounced outing clothes of those about him.

Now, with one leg crossed over the other and balancing his cigar before him, he continued:

"I 'll go back a bit," he began: "It was a year ago last February when it all began, down in Edmonton, where I had gone from Boston on real estate business. That was where I first met Donald McCoun, who gave me an account of the mineral riches on the Coppermine River. I was n't looking for ore—out there—but, to a Boston man, the word copper always sounds good. McCoun was so strong in his statements that, as you know, I took him back home with me. I had already had some dealings with L. E. Hayes, of Alaska, a copper operator and a promoter, and he and I and a few others informally associated ourselves to look into McCoun's story."

"Of course," went on Mr. Osborne, taking a draw on his cigar, "the Coppermine River was out of all creation—we could n't well go to it—not even Hayes, or Alaska Lew, volunteered to do that. But that was n't the point. It 's the knowledge of where big metal supplies can be found that counts. The trusts and big combines own or control every big mine in America, and by that I mean Alaska. As outsiders, we easily saw big probabilities in the ownership of a new unsuspected and inexhaustible field. I was even more sanguine

personally. The more I studied the question, the more I believed it even practicable to mine and ship the ore. You all understand my ideas on that point."

"By finding a water route out through Hudson Bay Straits to the Atlantic," broke in Alan.

"Precisely," continued the narrator. "The Coppermine River empties into Coronation Gulf. Everybody believes that part of the world locked in ice the year round. I wondered if this were true, and was anxious to find out. That 's why I bought the *Aleutian* and how I came to sail in it—that and to confirm McCoun's story. Well, the first thing we did was to decide to make a survey, and, if an expert confirmed the Scotch woodsman's story, to attempt to get control of the district from the Canadian government. I went back west with McCoun, and in June he and Randolph Tyrrell were sent down the river to spend the winter on the Coppermine, if necessary, and report.

"The plan was for the two men to make their way to the mouth of the McKenzie early in the spring. There, we hoped to meet them, and for that purpose, I at once purchased the steamer *Waldo*, at Boston, and sent her to San Francisco to be refitted as the *Aleutian*. At the same time, I chartered the *Yosemite* in San Francisco, and

sent Captain Campbell north with coal that the *Aleutian* might be able to continue her voyage through the Northwest Passage.

“Shortly after that, I met Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje, and it was arranged that they and you young men were to accompany us. Then a report came out of the north from Tyrrell. He said he had advanced far enough to confirm in large part what McCoun had told. In a letter addressed to me, he spoke of maps he was forwarding to Mr. Hayes, who had acted as secretary of our Company. When I asked to see these maps, Mr. Hayes denied having received them. Naturally enough, differences arose. The dispute between us grew when several of my associates found fault with my purchase of the *Aleutian*.”

“In short,” continued Mr. Osborne, “we split up as a company. In the firm belief that I was as well entitled to the fruits of Tyrrell’s labor as any of the others, I determined to carry out my original plans. In doing that, we all sailed from San Francisco in April. Then, as you know, we found that Mr. Hayes on the yacht he chartered in Seattle was racing with us into the Arctic. When at Unalaska each of us learned, as we did through Mr. Russell’s wireless message, that Mr. Tyrrell had changed all his plans and was making his way

out of the wilderness, Mr. Hayes and I hastened on the back track—each determined to see Tyrrell first.”

“And Hayes beat you?” exclaimed Ned.

Mr. Osborne was lighting a fresh cigar. He laughed.

“There was no race. The revenue cutter *Thetis*, on which I journeyed, had at least two days the start of Hayes’ *Gull*. Three hundred miles from Seattle, we lost our propeller, drifted under a jury rig for a week, and came into port towed by a lumber schooner two days late. May sixteenth, I reached Edmonton by rail. Hayes had been there and gone. He was already drifting down the Athabasca waiting to intercept Tyrrell coming up. I went as far as Athabasca Landing, and there decided to wait.

“That ’s where Hayes’ activity was too much for me. On the night of May twenty-fifth, he and Tyrrell ‘cast up’ at the landing, as the natives term it. I was asleep.” Mr. Osborne smiled, dropped his chair to the floor and leaned forward on the table. “As soon as my rival learned that I was in the settlement he hired a wagon, and before day was off for Edmonton. I ’m not much of a detective,” went on the speaker, “and I did n’t make any special fuss about following, but

I got away by noon. It was n't hard to follow them as far as Winnipeg—then I lost them. Whether they went south to the States or east, I could n't tell. I hired detectives to find out, and went home to Boston.

“About June tenth, Tyrrell was traced to New York, and I finally got an interview with him. Meanwhile, I had learned a good deal. The Company's plan had been to locate and buy the entire copper district. This, it turned out, under the Canadian laws, we could not do. All ore in Canada belongs to the Crown. Mines can only be located individually, and worked on a government royalty. No matter what Tyrrell had found, he would be able to maintain rights on no more than three claims at the most. One of these he might locate for himself and two for the men who sent him out or ‘grub staked’ him.”

“But he did find what you expected?” asked Major Honeywell.

Without answering directly, Mr. Osborne went on:

“When I finally got in touch with Tyrrell, everything turned out as I expected. He had specifically located three claims on what he says is the richest copper ore bed in the world. These claims and proofs he had turned over to Hayes,

and before I saw the agent, my rival had them registered in the names of individuals of his new company."

The three boys gave expression to their sympathetic disgust.

"Then it 's all off, I suppose," remarked Bob.

"On the contrary," went on Mr. Osborne, "it has just begun. What Tyrrell had to turn over is only a drop in the bucket. I 'll at least say for him that he now believes I had a better right to the claims than Hayes had, but he did not know in time. All he could do, as some compensation for the loss he had caused me, was to tell me all he knows. He says, if you have the time and perseverance to look for it, that somewhere up in that country there is a mine that will make the Tyrrell properties look like an ore dump."

"We 've heard about it," interrupted Ned.
"He 's right—"

Mr. Osborne, his face sobering, went on:

"He told me this. But, he told Hayes, too." Then, turning suddenly to Major Honeywell, he added: "Major, they say the only people who know the location of this fabled wealth are your old friends, the White Eskimos. That 's what I 'm doing up here. I 'm not bothering now about Tyrrell's claims, I 'm looking for the fountain

head, the apex of the drift, the copper center of the world," he added with a smile. "In other words, the secret of the White Eskimos."

The three boys could no longer restrain themselves.

"We know—I think—Say," broke from them simultaneously, and Mr. Osborne raised his hands as if to ward off a blow. Ned was the first to recover. With wild enthusiasm, he almost shouted:

"The White Eskimos? We are goin' there now. We 're on our way—"

"So are Mr. Hayes, and Tyrrell," answered Mr. Osborne. "I started up the river on the second of July. They left on the first. Hayes left the McKenzie at Fort Norman and struck inland. I came on down the river," and Mr. Osborne's eyes twinkled, "looking for three young gentlemen to help me out. Can you do it?"

CHAPTER XII

LURE OF GOLD

About midnight, the council in the cabin of the *Belle of Beaufort* came to an end. The flaming cheeks of the three boys were evidence enough of an exciting conclusion.

Mr. Osborne's further explanation presented this situation: The great copper district, of which the capitalist had been in search was now accepted as a fact. It was on the Coppermine River, and the claims located by Tyrrell were somewhere on this stream east of the Dismal Lakes. But, further to the north, either on the lower banks of this icebound river or, possibly, on the adjacent shores of the Arctic Sea, in what is known as Coronation Gulf, lay the real apex of the ore bed, a copper deposit of fabulous richness.

Where this might be no one knew. But one thing was known—L. E. Hayes, or "Alaska Lew," Mr. Osborne's successful rival, was now well on his way to that region. Mr. Osborne had followed his business enemy for over five weeks down the

swift wilderness rivers; tracing him from camp to camp and from one Hundson Bay post to another until Fort Norman was reached. Here, and with the experienced Tyrrell as guide, Mr. Hayes and his party had left the McKenzie and were hastening up a tributary leading to the Great Bear Lake. One hundred miles inland, they would reach Fort Franklin on Great Bear. At the eastern end of the Bear, two hundred and eighty-five miles from Fort Franklin they would strike Fort Confidence. Then came the Dease River with two hundred miles of up-stream work to the Dismal Lakes. Fifty miles of portage would bring the party to the Coppermine.

“Then,” explained Mr. Osborne, tracing this devious course on the map, “by raft or portage canoe, they have a clear waterway to the Arctic Sea.”

The waterway from Fort Norman to the Coppermine approximated six hundred miles. The *Belle of Beaufort*, tied up at the island at the mouth of the McKenzie was not less than another six hundred miles from Fort Norman. The main question to be answered was: Should the little steel steamer be pushed on up the McKenzie to Fort Norman, and thence through the Great Bear Lake to Dease River, or should the party return

at once to Herschel Island and make the voyage to Coronation Gulf by sea on the *Aleutian*?

The final decision to return to Herschel Island was not based so much on the slow, upcurrent voyage ahead of the *Belle* as it was on Mr. Osborne's desire to see and talk with the old factor, Mr. Hayward. When the boys had repeated the grizzled factor's wild story, adding thereto Bob's not unreasonable theory, Mr. Osborne decided the matter. The verdict was that the *Belle of Beaufort* should return at once, that Mr. Osborne should interview Hayward, and, with or without any light from him on the mystery of the fabled mine and mythical White Eskimos, that the entire party embark at once on the *Aleutian* and hasten to the mouth of the Coppermine in Coronation Gulf.

"Mr. Hayes has a good start ahead of us," explained Mr. Osborne. "But his luck may turn at last."

"Besides," suggested Ned, "he may not know what *we* know—about the White Eskimos."

Mr. Osborne shrugged his shoulders good naturedly.

"And *we* don't know a great deal about them," he said. "Anyway, we'll be looking for them—that's what Major Honeywell wants—and the

musk ox shooting is better around there than on the McKenzie, Colonel Oje."

"How about the Indian, the quarter-breed?" persisted Bob.

"Do we need him?" asked Major Honeywell.

"I 'm sure we do," answered Mr. Osborne, to the great relief of Dufour's young admirers. "He is a remarkable man. He certainly has brains, and a knowledge of the country. He may not know about the mine, but I 'm sure we can use him. We 'll keep him if he wants employment. I 'll see him in the morning."

There was no activity on the steamer in the morning until after Mr. Osborne had arisen. From that gentleman's account of his swift race down the great river, every one knew what his comfortable berth meant to him, and the early risers stepped lightly, cautioning the crew against noise. Starting from Athabasca Landing July first, Mr. Osborne had made his record-breaking trip in a flat-bottom boat known as a "sturgeon head." In this, with six men as a crew, he had traveled to Fort McPherson. In this trip he had traversed the Athabasca and its lake, Slave River, with its sixteen miles of foaming rapids, Slave Lake, and then, entering the McKenzie, had been swept northward, almost without pause, to McPherson over

fourteen hundred miles of torrent rarely less than a mile in width and hastening to the Arctic Ocean on a six-mile current.

"I started," as he had explained to the boys before retiring, "from Edmonton, in Alberta, the most northern railway point on the American continent. Between that point and where we now lie," he said, "stretches a land that is, beyond question, in many ways, the richest and most valuable in the world. From Edmonton, I drove ninety miles by stage to Athabasca Landing on the Athabasca River. Here I chartered a 'sturgeon head' and crew of six men and we threw ourselves on the current. We kept at it for five weeks."

When at last Mr. Osborne arose, he went ashore at once, while Yoshina prepared breakfast, and walked to the camp on the beach. He asked no one to accompany him, and the boys awaited his return with impatience. Evidently, it was not a question of offering Dufour employment at so much a day. Mr. Osborne was absent a good half hour. On his return, he merely said, "The Indian will return with us." No one asked for details. But, breakfast well under way, the reserved capitalist remarked:

"I 'm not surprised that you young men find Dufour interesting. He 's a strange character.

I brought him back with me because something impelled me to do so. This morning I tried to talk to him about his life here. He was very free until I spoke of our fabled mines and the White Eskimos. In fact, I put it to him direct. I asked him if he had any knowledge of what we are looking for. He answered me directly," said Mr. Osborne smiling. "He could n't discuss that."

"Which means, he said he does," exclaimed Bob. "I knew it."

"And also means, very likely," continued Mr. Osborne, "that he never will discuss it."

"Anyway," exclaimed Ned, "we have him with us—that 's something."

Alan leaned forward with an idea.

"Why not tell him, Mr. Hayes is hurrying over into that country?" he asked. "Perhaps, if he has any interest there, that news would loosen his tongue."

"That occurred to me," remarked Mr. Osborne. "I spoke of it. It helped a little. I could see he gave it a thought, anyway. He said your friend Ebeling would be glad to know it."

Ned hit the table with his fist.

"He meant Mr. Hayward," the boy exclaimed.

"I think not," answered Mr. Osborne, slowly. "Anyway, we 'll know in a short time."

Mr. Osborne paid his Loucheux canoemen and discharged them. Dufour was taken aboard with Mr. Osborne's bags, and at half past eight o'clock, the *Belle of Beaufort* was headed for Herschel Island once more. The day was the opposite of the previous one; the sea had subsided to a calm, and by ten o'clock, the snorting little steamer resembled a summer resort excursion boat. When luncheon was served, the day was sunny and warm, and the rocks of the island were just in sight. At five o'clock, to the surprise of those in the *Aleutian* and the *Yosemite*, the *Belle of Beaufort* was in Pauline Cove once more.

The disappointment over the postponed excursion was nothing compared to the interest in the possibilities of Mr. Osborne's investigation on the island. But this did not begin at once. Dufour came aboard the steamer. It was afterwards learned that Mr. Osborne had requested him to remain for the evening meal, after which he retained the quarter-breed in conversation on subjects pertaining to the country. Then, by prearrangement, Major Honeywell engaged Dufour in talk concerning big game and Mr. Osborne quietly withdrew.

On the deck, he was joined by Ned, who had previously retired. It was yet perfectly light, but

the evening chill was on. The waiting boy had procured a heavy coat for Mr. Osborne, and the two hastened to the landing ladder at the foot of which lay the dingy. Mr. Osborne had put his foot on the steps when a voice behind brought him to a pause.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the voice, "but, at the risk of giving offense, I must ask if you are going ashore to consult with Mr. Ebeling."

It was the quarter-breed, Leon Dufour. Never before had the Indian seemed so much a white man. Neither belligerent nor obsequious, he stood as one who had a right to know.

"We are," said Mr. Osborne, with some resentment.

"If it is on the subject we discussed this morning," continued Dufour as he tossed overboard the end of one of Colonel Oje's cigarettes, "may I make a suggestion?"

"As you like," replied Mr. Osborne austerely. Ned winced. He saw no occasion for the severity of his companion's tone. But, while the boy saw the tall, graceful Indian's form straighten, he also saw a quick change come over Mr. Osborne. That gentleman's business success and his millions had not come to him through luck. Above all, he was a judge of human nature. Apparently reserved

and distant, he seemed to know intuitively when to be the reverse. Almost instantly, a smile shot into his face. "We will be more than glad," he added.

Dufour bowed slightly.

"I suggest that I accompany you," he remarked without irritation.

As if on his dignity, the quarter-breed did not take up the oars when the three boarded the dingy. Ned almost chuckled. He was at heart proud of this strange product of the wilderness and he was not averse to seeing the humble hunter become for the moment, a guest. At the landing, Dufour stepped ashore. Without waiting for permission, he said:

"I will precede you. I wish to see Mr. Ebeling first."

As Dufour walked on ahead, Mr. Osborne turned to Ned and said:

"He 's even bigger than I thought. I made a mistake."

Ebeling had already left the barracks at sight of the approaching dingy, but neither Mr. Osborne nor Ned had made him out in the crowd that gathered to meet them. Before they saw the young Englishman, they encountered Factor Hayward, Engellard and Gompers, of the Whale Company.

Ned had presented Mr. Osborne, and was making inquiries concerning the aeroplane, when Ebeling hailed him. It was a jovial greeting.

"A sudden return?" laughed Ebeling, after the formalities of presentation to Mr. Osborne. The latter, always keen and observing things about him with penetration, was making mental note of everything with his usual celerity. Even as they talked, he had measured old Hayward.

"Yes," began Ned, glancing at Mr. Osborne.

"We returned to have a talk with you," added the latter, bowing toward Ebeling.

There was no smile on the Englishman's clean-cut face. Drawing soberly on his pipe, he looked from Mr. Osborne and Ned toward Dufour. The Indian moved his shoulders slightly. Ebeling seemed neither puzzled nor debating. Manifestly the statement did not surprise him. Then, apparently as a matter of form, he said:

"On the matter concerning which you spoke to Dufour?"

Mr. Osborne nodded his head. Ebeling, with another look at Dufour, turned slowly and with easy grace, swung his arm toward the barracks door. Within the room, a fire of driftwood crackled on the hearth. The quarter-breed entered with the others, and, as Ebeling drew a couple of

crude but comfortable skin chairs within the warmth of the blaze, Dufour, coming close to the two visitors, remarked:

"You will observe that I accompany you, uninvited. The reason you will understand later."

"For the present," added Ebeling, "if you are quite comfortable, you will excuse us. I cannot even consent to an interview until I have consulted others."

"Certainly," exclaimed Mr. Osborne, in what was now a most gracious tone. As Ebeling and Dufour withdrew, he seated himself again, lit a cigar and settled himself comfortably in the low chair.

"Considerable mystery," remarked Ned, after a long silence.

"The very best sign," answered Mr. Osborne smiling. "We are on the right track, and something is brewing."

"It would n't brew for us," added Ned smiling in turn. "I suppose they see that you are different."

"On the contrary," answered Mr. Osborne, shrugging his shoulders, "circumstances may have changed."

As time passed and neither Ebeling nor Dufour returned, Ned grew restless. When he intimated

that he would take a look outside, his companion shook his head.

“It ’s a little like prying,” suggested Mr. Osborne, with a smile. Thereupon, the boy beguiled the time with further details of his adventures on the ice. At last, as the cabin began to grow dark, Ebeling came slowly into the room. Various persons had passed through the big room at times, but, at that moment, the three were alone. In spite of this fact, the Englishman advanced until he stood between his visitors and the fire. His face was in shadow.

“I was detained,” he remarked. “We had much to consider.”

The red-coated form of the policeman was as erect and jaunty as usual, but his voice had not its vibrant ring. As he relit his pipe with a flaring stick from the fire, it could be seen that his face had the look of a man deciding a matter of vital import. Then he dropped into a squatting posture, sitting on his heels in the manner of those who live without chairs and, beating out the fire of his burning stick, began to peck at it—perhaps nervously. Mr. Osborne said nothing.

“You do not know me,” Ebeling exclaimed suddenly. “And, to be as frank, I do not know you. The subject you have come to discuss is—to me,”

and he hesitated, "well—a part of my life. Peculiar circumstances surround it. Those of us to whom it means so much—this secret—have guarded it—even with lies," and he looked at Ned in palpable embarrassment. "Apart from the rest of the world, we have lived with it until I suppose it has become an obsession with us. It is no easy matter to suddenly drop the curtain behind which we have hidden this—this part of our lives."

"I understand," replied Mr. Osborne. Then, after a long pause in which no one spoke, he leaned forward and said:

"Mr. Ebeling, you are now in a position where your judgment must be based on your intuition. I have no credentials either personal or financial. My name is J. W. Osborne. My home is in Boston, Massachusetts. In business, I was a manufacturer of rubber boots and shoes. At present, I am the chief owner of the *Aleutian*, and my object in coming into this part of the world is to confirm a belief that hereabouts may be found the most valuable body of copper ore in existence. It is perhaps unnecessary to attempt to estimate my financial holdings, but, for the purpose, put it at ten million dollars. That sum is available to finance any discovery that I may make up here. In

so far as this reputed ore body may concern you or your friends, I can only add that you have my word that I am an honest business man prepared to entertain propositions and treat them fairly. I can say no more."

Ebeling knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose to his feet.

"Come with me," he said in a thick voice, pointing to the door.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET OF THE WHITE ESKIMOS

It was not difficult to guess the destination of the three men. Squat and low beneath its faded red flag—the century and a half unlowered colors of the Hudson Bay Company—Factor Hayward's cabin and post headquarters, stood less than fifty paces below on the path to the beach. Darkness would come for but a few hours that night, but it was the time of sleep and not even the glow of tupik lamps livened the scene. A chill wind swept up from the bay.

As Mr. Osborne and Ned stepped into Mr. Hayward's cabin, Ebeling dropped the big door-bar into place. Save for an oil lantern, the place was dark. Heavy air filled the room—the odor of soot, of fish, of furs; and there was lack of ventilation. There had been a fire on the black hearth, but it now showed only a few coals. At the greasy, mutilated table, one hand shading his eyes from the smoky lantern light, sat the grizzled factor. By his side, and apparently in conversation with him, stood Dufour, the quarter-breed.

Ned was sure they would find it so. Here, in Ebeling, Hayward and Dufour, he knew lay the secret of the White Eskimos. Hayward dropped his hand at once, gave Dufour a look that was hard to understand, and then came forward. His usual open manner was gone. With awkward greeting, he managed to find chairs in the dark and then, in the Indian tongue, spoke to Dufour.

While the quarter-breed hastened to replenish the fire, Hayward disappeared in the corner of the long room, and, in a few moment returned with a large candle. As it flared up from a grease-encrusted socket on the stone mantel, Mr. Osborne glanced about. If he felt as the three boys had, in their disillusionment, he gave no hint of it.

As if Ebeling's friends were awaiting his opinion or verdict, the Englishman said at once:

"I am satisfied."

If he meant to say more, he was interrupted. The old factor, his eyes snapping beneath his bushy eyebrows, almost pushed him aside, and, stepping in front of Mr. Osborne, exclaimed:

"You have come—at last—out of the south?"

The keen merchant bowed his head and repeated, significantly:

"I have come—at last—out of the south."

“And you want to know—my secret and his—him a settin’ up thar awaitin’ an’ prayin’—?”

Mr. Osborne drew himself up, fixing his eyes on the old man.

“I want to know—yes—your secret and his. For that, I will pay—”

The old man sprang forward, clutched at his tangled, dirty beard and then, with a wild look at Ebeling and Dufour, almost shouted:

“Money—gold—show me the gold. My God, is there money in the world?”

Mr. Osborne stood motionless for a moment. Then he laid a hand on the old man’s trembling arm and led him to the table. Inarticulately, the wilderness-wasted creature mumbled and stroked his smoke-tanned, wrinkled face. Mr. Osborne’s hand slipped into his inside coat pocket and extracted a long, flat pocketbook. With a flip, he snapped it open and an instant later held in his hand ten uncreased gold certificates—each a hundred dollar bill. The old man almost reeled. Then his gnarled hands shot forward:

“Ours?” he whispered. “All ours?”

“Mr. Hayward,” said Mr. Osborne in a quick, authoritative tone, “there is not much money here. But I command money—all I need. If your se-

cret is worth buying, this money and more is yours.’’

“How much?’’ came from the distracted factor, in a voice that almost panted.

“Enough to make you and your friends rich.’’

The old man caught Mr. Osborne by the arms.

“And you ’ll take him and me away where it’s summer—where there ’s bread and meat for white men?’’

The unmoved man of millions pushed the agitated old man onto a stool by the table and tossed the bills on the greasy board. Hayward’s palzied fingers closed on the yellow notes with a sweeping grip. For an instant, his long yellow-white beard sank on his clenched hands, and then, with a gasp, he was on his feet.

“At last,’’ he shouted, his hands clasping the notes to his hairy breast. And then, as if the cabin and those in it had been blotted out, he sprang toward the door. But the alert Dufour was quicker. Claspig the wild-eyed man in his strong arms, he carried him back and in a few minutes the almost demented factor was apparently calm again. The scattered bills having been collected and placed once more in Hayward’s hands, his head fell forward, and, mumbling to

himself, Ebeling placed the man on a bench beside the fire.

“Would you mind opening the door for a few moments?” asked Mr. Osborne. This done, he stepped outside, walked a short time in the fresh air, and then, lighting a cigar, re-entered the foul smelling cabin.

“Now,” he went on in a businesslike voice, “I think one of you had better speak for Mr. Hayward. Let us understand ourselves.”

Mr. Osborne offered his cigar case to Ebeling and Dufour, but each declined it. Then the young Englishman, standing before the fire, eyeing Dufour and Hayward in turn, his empty pipe gripped in his hand, began his story:

“There is no reservation,” he said. “When I have finished, you will know all we know. Then it rests with you as to whether we have acted wisely. I am sure we have. For so many years we have been disappointed that it seemed impossible to wait longer. As for him,” added Ebeling, in a low voice indicating the preoccupied and mumbling Hayward, “and for the other man who has waited with him, it is now or never. In a last, vain hope that we might get the message we so long expected, Dufour was on his way to McPherson. It was not necessary for him to complete the trip.

There was no message there for us. The Loucheux canoemen with you," he explained, looking at Mr. Osborne, "brought him that word. Your arrival seemed providential."

"Let us believe it is good luck for all," exclaimed Mr. Osborne.

"It will only be lucky for me," resumed Ebeling, "if Mr. Napier will forgive me for wilfully lying to him. I did not tell the truth about Hayward, and I misled him as to myself. But I thought I had to do it for this old man—not for myself. And I was not skilled enough to equivocate."

Ned did not know what to say. Lying, to him, was unjustifiable, for any purpose. So he finally replied, with a smile:

"I reckon it 's the intent. You certainly meant nothing but good."

The policeman seemed relieved, for he took a long breath and filled his pipe. Then, suddenly dropping to his favorite posture of sitting on his heels, while the driftwood fire flickered and flared behind him, he resumed:

"I know of no White Eskimos. But there is a white man who has buried himself in the Arctic ice for sixty years. He is an Englishman and his name is Joel Mellum. We have not heard from

him for nearly two years. If he is alive, he is now eighty-seven years old. He is guarding the treasure that we have hoped was to make us all rich. He is Hayward's partner 'sitting up there in the land that God 's forgot'."

As if relieved, Ebeling paused, drew on his pipe nervously, and then went on:

"Mellum sailed into the Arctic with Sir John Franklin. He was twenty-seven years old. In the summer of 1850, when Franklin's two vessels had been abandoned and the survivors made their dash toward the mainland, Mellum and two others became separated from the main party. Later they came upon a number of their companions, frozen. What followed, we have never learned in detail. That Fall, Mellum, alone, came to his senses again. He had been found, many miles to the south, wandering aimlessly and demented, by a band of Eskimo hunters."

"From that day to this," went on Ebeling, "Mellum has lived with the Eskimos. From place to place, he journeyed with them, lost in time the last outward signs of the civilization he had known, and became, not only an Eskimo in his life and dress, but their head man and leader. Fifteen years ago, he made the great discovery.

"As Mellum and the tribe with whom he lived

made their way westward along the Arctic Sea, the white man heard the tale of the copper hole. The natives who saved him were plentifully supplied with the metal. They had copper spears and cooking utensils—even ivory-set copper ornaments—and they told almost unbelievable stories of the riches of the far western source of these. It meant little to the white man, who lived on without ambition, until, in time, he began to understand that the weapons and dishes had been hammered out of almost pure metal.

“Then, suddenly, he became curious. He persuaded his savage companions to show him the source from which came such a wonderful ore. Most of the long years that the lost man had lived with the natives had been passed on the big arm of land south of Dease Straits, now known as Kent Peninsula. Annually, crossing Ely Inlet, there were hunting trips in the Barren Lands to the south. Every few years, the elder men of the tribe would separate from the hunters on these trips, and disappear into the west. The following Winter, they would reappear, their sledges heavy with green chips of pure copper.”

“Twenty-five years ago,” continued the policeman, now throwing himself cross-legged on the wide hearth, “the white man was permitted to go

with those departing for a new supply of metal. What he was to come to he had no notion. But it was, I suppose, the most curious mine in the world."

"Where?" went on Ebeling. "I 'll try to show you in a few minutes. But it was an island, an island in Coronation Gulf, and it was neither more nor less than the shell of a volcano."

Mr. Osborne's only indication of what this meant to him was the silent act of relighting his dead cigar. Ned sank from the bench on which he had been sitting open mouthed to the warm stone hearth alongside Ebeling. The policeman continued:

"But the most singular thing was n't the island and the hole and the mine." Ebeling leaned forward and smiled for the first time. "You don't have to go down to the States for trusts," he exclaimed, "or copper kings. When Mellum saw how things were on the copper island, he understood why his tribe and others had n't gone there to live and helped themselves when they liked. It was owned by an old man of the name of Oomikot, the Eskimo copper king of the Arctic."

"Go on," whispered Ned, edging forward.

"Oomikot was then an old man. He had found the island many years before. Some said he was

an Asiatic Tchuktehi. But that does n't matter. Those who had owned the place with him were all dead. There he lived with two wives almost as old as himself, levying tribute on the rest of the Eskimo world and farming out the privileges of his island to those who could pay. And that meant caribou, pemmican, dried venison, oil, blubber, furs, wood and any other thing he wanted. He was the only Eskimo in the world, I suppose, who did n't have to fight for a living. Anyway, he was king of the copper island. How he kept his mine and laid tribute on the rest of his icy world, I don't know. But he did, and after he and Mellum came together, they never separated.

"Partners?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"Hardly that," went on Ebeling. "But Mellum staid. He told Hayward later it was because there was something to do there, something to look forward to each summer when the tribes came for ore. And, besides, Oomikot had stone winter houses, and plenty of oil for fuel and food. One of the old chief's wives died after a time, but things ran on pretty much as they had in the past for ten years. Then Oomikot died."

"And the white man owned the mine?" broke in Ned.

“He did,” answered Ebeling, in a short time, “because he married the widow.”

“An Eskimo?” exclaimed Ned, astounded.

Again Ebeling smiled.

“That island,” he explained, “is nearly two miles across. From the south, over on the mainland where there is no fog and you can make it out, it looks like a battered hat, the rim of which is the rocky, flat shore covered with sand and ice, and the creased crown of which is the old volcano. From the northeast, you can see a break in the dead crater. Half way down to the brim, the side of the volcano is missing—a good deal of it lies on the beach below.”

“At the bottom of the break, there is a shelf, a shoulder on the rocky height sheltered on three sides by the cliffs of the yet standing crater. There, Oomikot had his houses and there Mellum lived and, I hope, is living yet. Within the dead crater, vacant lava channels lead through solid rock into beds of ore that a miner’s pick has never touched.”

“The ore used—” began Mr. Osborne.

“Is taken from the broken fragments of the crater side. I have never seen the place, but Mr. Hayward says the metal lies there like a hill of emerald. Ship loads of ore are there ready for

transportation. It 's there and we own it," added Ebeling, his eyes sparkling as he scrambled to his feet. "There 's nothing like it in the world. What begins over there on the Yukon and what you 've found on the Coppermine is nothing—it 's the dregs from the fountainhead, old Oomikot's hidden island of mineral, inexhaustible ore, such as only three white men have ever seen. That 's the mystery. Do you blame him?" continued the Englishman, pointing to the old factor, "after all these years of hoping and waiting and his compact with Mellum?"

"You have not told us about this compact," said Mr. Osborne slowly, but, as Ned could see, with suppressed excitement.

Ebeling passed his hand over his brow as if to compose himself.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed quickly and nervously, "I am just coming to it."

CHAPTER XIV

WHY EBELING ENTERED THE WILDERNESS

Ebeling made an attempt to refill his empty pipe, but his hand shook and he even laughed in a half hysterical way.

"Perhaps I had better speak," exclaimed a voice in the dark. It was Dufour, the quarter-breed, who had left the now quiet Hayward and was standing behind the stool on which Mr. Osborne sat. A look of relief came into Ebeling's face, and he nodded his head.

"About fifteen years ago," began Dufour, his voice calm and with but a trace of his French and Loucheux accent, "Mr. Hayward was a Company trader up river at Fort Resolution. The factor in charge was my grandfather, Anatole Dufour. After the spring 'cast up'—when the trappers and Indians went to the post with their winter furs," explained Dufour, "the two men went inland to the Coppermine River. The story of the copper mines—even of gold—has always lived in the wilderness," continued the English-voiced Indian.

“By lake and river and portage, they carried their canoe to the long dreamed of river of metal and on it, they journeyed to the sea.

“They found neither copper nor gold. But, drawn on as was the great McKenzie when he crossed the frozen continent from Hudson’s Bay to the Pacific, these two men wandered further. Skirting the shores of Coronation Bay, chasing walrus at sea and caribou on land, in a week, their frail canoe brought them to a wandering band of natives. From them, they heard the story of the copper island, of Oomikot and the White Eskimo Mellum. Waiting for favorable weather, they at last crossed over to the just visible island and, after forty-five years, the Arctic survivor saw white men once more. That was late in August of 1895.”

For a moment, Dufour was silent. Hayward sat with glazed eyes, still staring stupidly into the fire.

“Bad weather broke at once. The two men from the south did not leave Mellum’s island home until winter had come again. But in January, when the sun returned after the short Arctic night, they set out on newly made snowshoes on the long trail to the McKenzie. These three men, thrown together by fate, had become joint owners

and partners in the hidden wealth. And the compact they made was sworn on the memory of their mothers.

“At once, my grandfather resigned from the service of the company. He was relieved a year from that spring. I was twelve years old. With him, I journeyed to Paris. For six years, my grandfather struggled to keep faith with the half savage Mellum waiting in the snow and dark on the other side of the continent. At first, it seemed easy enough. But again and again the big plan failed. Perhaps the three partners were too eager.”

“He was trying to sell the mine outright?” suggested Mr. Osborne.

“For five million francs,” answered Dufour in a lower tone. “One million dollars for a hole in the ice.” He shrugged his shoulders. “I was too young to understand much. Besides, I was in school and knew little but that my aged relative went from city to city with his mine—his dream. At the end of six years, his savings were gone, and he had secured nothing from the financial world but a smile. One morning we found him dead in bed. To cover the expenses of his funeral, I appealed to my only friend in the new world.” He

stepped around in front of Mr. Osborne and Ned and laid his hand on Ebeling's shoulder.

"This man I met at school, and we were friends. He came to me at once in Paris. After my grandfather's funeral, we together examined his papers. His story I knew in a vague way—all except the location of the island. This, he had recorded nowhere. After searching in vain, we conceived the idea of carrying on the dead man's work. Everyone laughed at us. At last, in complete despair and six years after I left the great northwest, there remained nothing but to return to my people."

"Could n't you interest any of your English friends?" asked Mr. Osborne, looking toward Ebeling.

"That was what led to our despair," answered the policeman, who had now regained his composure, and took up the narrative again. "We naturally went to my father, Lord Cranford Ebeling. He was worse than indifferent, for which I could not blame him. A speculation in Mexican silver mines had turned out disastrously, and he not only refused to assist us, but he insisted that I should make no attempt to help Dufour realize on the secret. In fact," said Ebeling, shrugging his shoulders, "we quarreled and, as we were both

stubborn, I was soon in a position to do as I liked."

"Disowned you?" exclaimed Ned sympathetically.

"Not exactly," answered the young Englishman, "but, as he stopped my allowance, we," and he nodded his head toward the quarter-breed, and laughed, "were not precisely on what you Americans call 'Easy Street'. In short, we were broke. And this forced us to act. The day we spent our last shilling, I got an interview that, for a time, dispersed the clouds. F. G. Jackson, West Indian sugar importer, whose son I knew at school, listened to us, and at last consented to investigate our story.

"We had not much to offer. Old Anatole Dufour had died in want, trying to sell the mine for one million dollars. We knew that was hopeless. But we persuaded Mr. Jackson and his partner to enter into a provisional contract. They were to supply us with funds to return to America, designate an engineer to accompany us, and, if we could find Mr. Hayward and our story was confirmed, supply the funds to fully finance an operating company. In that company, Mellum, Hayward, Dufour and I were to hold half the stock, and our backers, the other half."

Mr. Osborne nodded his head as if this covered a material point.

“Dufour set out at once by way of a Hudson Bay steamer, while I waited for the selection of the engineer. This expert, a Cornish man of the name of Gwynn, and I followed a few weeks later on a Quebec steamer. We were too late to get down the river that fall, and we wintered in Edmonton. When the ice broke up in the spring, we began our quest for Dufour and Hayward. After weeks of hardship, we reached Fort Resolution, south of Slave Lake, and found my friend. While Gwynn and I had toasted our shins in the Edmonton hotel, he had come overland from Churchill. Hayward, whom we should have found here, was gone. Three years before, he had been transferred to Herschel Island.

“A month later, we found him. Six years had gone by, but the old man was waiting. One letter from old Dufour had come to him promising certain success. But much had yet to be done. Gwynn, the engineer, reached Herschel Island in a state of collapse. Fatigue and travel had worn him into a sleepless state. Before he was able to undertake the long journey yet between him and the copper island, winter was on us again, and

then the Arctic night. In that, suddenly, Gwynn fell into a fever, and died.

"We were without funds. I joined the police, and Dufour turned to the woods. We wrote to London on the steamer going up the river next summer. And again, the next summer and the next. By each returning whaler, we dispatched appeals to the man who alone could help us. Mr. Hayward urged us on: the compact he held with the man buried in Paris and the other buried in the North seemed to grow on him with each passing season. We remained loyal to those who had advanced us money."

"And you had no response in these six years?" asked Mr. Osborne, straightening.

"Last summer, came our only letter. It said Mr. Jackson was dead. His executor had the matter under consideration. If he decided to take advantage of the contract, he would send a representative to us this summer."

"And he did n't come?" broke in Ned.

"He did not come. Nor did we receive further word. That was the message Dufour got from the men on the river. Now, you know why we kept silence. And you know why we at last feel free to talk."

For some moments, there was no word spoken.

The stricken factor sat shaking his heavy head and talking to himself. The Indian turned and replenished the fire. The Englishman, as if relieved of a long carried and heavy burden, was deftly filling his pipe again. But he was not composed. Mr. Osborne had risen and opening the door was drinking in the cold, night air. Ned followed him. The twinkle of lights on the steamers far out in the bay was grateful to him, like a cup of cold water in a fever. The spell of what seemed almost a dream was broken. Before Ned could speak, Mr. Osborn turned and re-entered the room.

“Are you prepared to sell the property for a million dollars, if it bears out your description?”

“Let Dufour speak,” responded Ebeling, after a short pause.

The Indian motioned toward the mumbling factor, and said:

“Half the interest I may have in this is Ebeling’s, of course. What we did in England was without consulting those who were equal partners with my grandfther. But Mr. Hayward, in calmer moments, approved. We cannot consult the other man who now may not even be alive. If our word is good, you may consider such an offer made.”

Mr. Osborne walked to the far side of the hearth where the aged factor sat as if lost to all about him. As he reached forth his hand, the trembling, mumbling old man sprang to his feet. Mr. Osborne caught up the smoking lantern and held it so that its rays fell on Hayward's face. The factor, his eyes staring, seemed trying to think.

"Hayward," exclaimed Mr. Osborne sharply, "shall we go and find Mellum? Do you want to sell the mine?"

The vacant eyed man shrank back.

"Mellum?" he whispered in a dry voice at last. "He is dead. Old Dufour is dead."

Mr. Osborne sighed and replaced the lantern.

"Can you show me the location of the island?" he asked, turning again to Ebeling and Dufour.

Ebeling stepped to the old man's side.

"The map," he said, in a low voice. The shrinking factor seemed infused with new life. His bent body straightened and as Ebeling sought to place his hand beneath the factor's greasy and worn coat, Hayward clasped his knotted hands across his breast.

"It 's mine," he shouted. "Mine and his."

Mr. Osborne stepped forward again, and confronted the agitated man.

"Hayward," he said in tones that were soft

and yet compelling. "I 've come to you out of the South. I 've come to save the man who 's waiting up there. You saw the ship that flies in the air. Listen; it will bring Mellum to you. Give me the map."

Without protest, he reached into the trapper's pocket. It was empty. He looked at Ebeling and Dufour.

"The map," added Ebeling, stepping again to Hayward's side.

Again the stricken man shrank back.

"It 's mine and his; mine—" he almost snarled this time. But, even as he wailed out the words, his eyes again fell on the erect figure of Mr. Osborne. The latter leaned forward and fixed his gaze on the shrinking factor, and then, very slowly, repeated:

"I want that map."

A change seemed to come over the man before him. With something like a sob, old Hayward stepped back, his eyes yet on Mr. Osborne's, and then his form faded into the gloom beyond the table. Those waiting stood motionless. There was heavy breathing, the soft sound of many articles being skilfully moved, and then silence. A gnarled shaking hand slowly emerged from the

dark. In it, lay a worn, almost black, packet—an old map many times folded.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Osborne in the same soft, forceful voice. “Now, gentlemen,” he added in his sharper, business tone, “let us consider it settled. It is growing late. To-morrow, we will make and sign a formal bill of sale. I hope you will give Mr. Hayward every care. Good night.”

As he and the boy stepped out into the starlit night, it would have taken more than the sharp wind blowing up from the bay below to have chilled Ned. Three hours of turbulent emotion had set his pulses throbbing and his brain awirl.

“Mr. Osborne,” he exclaimed as the heavy headquarters’ door closed upon them, “do you think Mr. Hayes will ever find that island?”

“Give him time and he will,” answered the capitalist. “He never operates on a small scale. If there are people where he has gone who know about it, he ’ll drag it out of them, or—”

“Or what?” interrupted the boy.

“Let it go at that,” replied the man, laughing. “He ’ll find it out.”

But Ned had just begun. As he and his companion hastened toward the landing, he went on:

“And ‘the ship that flies in the air’. What **did**

you mean? Are we going to use the aeroplane to locate the island and find old Mellum?"

The boy paused—almost holding his breath.

"If not that," answered Mr. Osborne slowly, "we ought to use it to beat our friend Hayes."

Ned could have turned a handspring for joy.

"It 's all ready," he shouted. "We could start in the morning."

"'We'," repeated his companion. "Who are 'we'? Don't forget that Mr. Hayes is not out for pleasure. Any one who tries to cross his path may have something to do besides operating an aeroplane."

The boy sobered instantly.

"I meant Alan and myself," he replied. "But we can carry another—possibly two more passengers. But, we 'd be glad to try it alone. Unless—"

"If Mr. Hayward were in condition to do so," interrupted the man, "of course, he should accompany you. You must remember that all these negotiations are unknown to Mellum. In the absence of Hayward, his logical successor is Dufour, the heir of Mellum's and Hayward's partner."

To add either Ebeling or the Indian to the crew of the *White North* was joy supreme.

"Fine," chuckled Ned. "When can we start?"

“To-morrow. The *Aleutian* will follow as soon as she is able. If the island of copper can be reached either by the *Aleutian* or the *Belle of Beaufort*—and this ought to tell us,” he added holding out Hayward’s fifteen-year-old packet, “I ’ll expect to see the Airship Boys camped on the crater plateau awaiting us—”

Ned stopped short and caught his companion’s arm.

“What do you mean by ‘beating’ Mr. Hayes?” he asked, suddenly. “How can he take what you ’ve bought?”

“Two of the partners have not consented to the sale,” answered Mr. Osborne, and Ned saw him smile. “Mr. Hayward may never be able to consent to the proposed deal. If Hayes should get to old man Mellum first and buy his interest, well, at the best, it would mean litigation. Dufour owns only a third interest.”

The boy studied a moment; then he said:

“Give us that map and the Indian. If you find Mr. Hayes on copper island when you get there, we ’ll be sitting on top of him.”

CHAPTER XV

THE WHITE NORTH IN COMMISSION

When the dingy in which Ned rowed Mr. Osborne out to the steamer scraped against the ladder, one person, keeping watchful vigil, was waiting to receive them. Bob Russell was the first to hear the big news. Colonel Oje had retired, as it was after eleven o'clock; Major Honeywell was dozing over a newspaper that Mr. Osborne had brought from civilization and Alan was fast asleep, his head pillowed in his arms on the dining saloon table.

"Turn out, the airship watch," exclaimed Ned, catching his friend by his thick, long uncut hair. "All hands on deck to sail at once. Ho for Oomikot Island and its hills of emerald copper."

"Were we right?" blinked Alan sleepily as his wits came to him. "Did Ebeling and Dufour know?"

"Did they know?" laughed Ned. "They were bossin' the job. Except when the old man sprung his trolley that morning. Mr. Osborne 'll tell it all."

But Mr. Osborne only smiled and waved his hand toward Ned.

"I 've done nearly all the talking this evening," he said. "It 's your turn now. I 'm off to bed. We 'll make our program in the morning."

Major Honeywell lingered with the boys. Ned repeated the story of the visit ashore. As the story progressed, Alan and Bob bubbled like glasses of soda water. When the end came, the speaker and each of his hearers began talking at once. In turn, the comments of each simmered down to a main idea.

Major Honeywell pretended the greatest disappointment over the discovery as it seemed conclusive proof that the White Eskimo story was, after all, only a myth.

"Yet," he added, "I 'd like to see Mellum, anyway. From a student's point of view, it will be interesting to note the effect of sixty years' isolation on a white man. I predict that he will have more of a tendency to revert to the lower Eskimo than he will tend to raise the savage to his plane."

The boys cared little for this.

"Next to beatin' Mr. Hayes at his own game," said Bob, "it 's me for the copper mine. Oomikot Island, and the lava tunnels leadin' into the bowels of the earth. I ain't carin' much for the cop-

per, but think o' them tunnels! There may be things in there that old Oomikot or Mellum himself never dreamed of. They may run under the sea clear over to the mainland. And, if they do, like as not there 's an entrance over there. That might be one way to get our copper out. Then you 'd only need a railroad across the Barren Lands over to Hudson Bay and there you are."

"In the meantime, if these things are n't arranged to suit your journalistic fancy," suggested Alan, "you 'll have old Mellum to work on. I reckon an interview with the survivor of the Franklin Expedition would be about as big an Arctic story as the discovery of the pole."

"And the photographs of the old man, his home and his crater island. Why," went on Bob in his enthusiasm, "a picture of old Mellum at work beating native copper into dishes would be almost like a moving picture of prehistoric man chipping flints in the stone age."

"That 's all right," said Alan, when he got a chance. "But it 's pretty much sentiment. No one seems to take Mr. Osborne's point of view. I know what he 's after. He knows that copper is the one big staple, valuable metal that the world wants. He has seen the big companies getting control of it all over the world. But, up here, he

and Mr. Hayes both know that there is a supply of the metal that the copper kings have not reckoned on. The man who gets control of it will be the real copper king of the world. I reckon Mr. Osborne ain't carin' much about me, but I think just enough of him, to want to help him win out. We 'll try it in the airship and if it comes down to a fight with his rival—either fists or wits—I 'll be right on deck for my boss and that 's J. W. Osborne, of Boston."

This enthusiastic speech, of course, met with emphatic approval.

"Right," exclaimed Ned. "You are all right. And I believe we all have still another motive in what we 've got to do at once. At least, I want to see Dufour and Ebeling—to say nothing of Mr. Hayward and old Mellum—come into what 's theirs. They 'll never be able to do anything alone and Mr. Hayes is not likely to go out of his way to help them. Mr. Osborne will do the fair and square thing with all of them. Besides," and he turned with a smile toward Major Honeywell, "you fellows seem to forget that Mr. Osborne is not the only man who put money into this expedition. Major Honeywell, here, and Colonel Oje are interested in the *Aleutian* as a business venture. We boys have already had our reward in

the treasure of fossil ivory. Here 's hoping that we can get Oomikot Island and its copper mine not only for our new friends but for our old friends."

"In that event," laughed Major Honeywell bowing, "you 'd better all turn in. Looks as if to-morrow might be your busy day."

In the morning, when the three *Aleutian* owners and the three boys met on deck, Mr. Jackson and Captain McKay having disappeared below, Mr. Osborne said:

"Do you care to see just where the island is?"

A moment later, all were in the capitalist's cabin. On the table, lay Hayward's worn chart—a double page from an old geography. The outlines and captions were so worn as to be almost indecipherable. There was a cross on the lower part of what, from the steamer's chart, was made out to be Coronation Bay. And, on the colorless space of the Arctic Ocean, in faded ink, were these words:

"6 criks east of Coppurmine 3 lob stiks 2 west of crik 1 east of crik and 25 mile north in foul weather line frum west lob stiks."

The boys and Mr. Osborne knew what lob sticks were—tall, isolated spruce trees with the limbs removed from a part of the trunk to serve as mon-

uments or direction signs—and Ned explained them to Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje.

“It seems simple enough,” said Mr. Osborne. “After reaching the mouth of the Coppermine, we shall have to go east along the gulf shore until six streams or creeks have been crossed. At the sixth one, two trees have been trimmed on the west side of the creek so that they stand in line with the island which is twenty-five miles at sea. In fair weather, its peak can be seen. If you miss a creek,” he said, patting Ned on the shoulder, “watch for the lob sticks and then turn north.”

“And watch for Mr. Hayes while you ’re doin’ it,” added Bob. “Meanwhile the old *Aleutian* will be plugging along to join you from the sea. Look out for us, too.”

Ebeling met Mr. Osborne and the boys, who then went ashore, with no encouraging news as to Mr. Hayward. The old method of restoring his calmness was being tried. Engellard, the post trader, had taken the factor on a climb to the island heights looking for ducks. Dufour had spent the night watching over the restless old man, and was now asleep in Ebeling’s apartment. The young Englishman had resumed his easy, care-free bearing, and both Alan and Bob shook his hand with a new grip.

It was necessary to awaken Dufour and in a few minutes a brief memorandum of sale was drawn up and signed by the Indian and Mr. Osborne. Then came the matter of the immediate plans. After the program as arranged had been submitted to Ebeling and the Indian, the boys were a little alarmed to observe a look of doubt on Dufour's face.

"Won't you go?" asked Ned impulsively.

"I?" answered the quarter-breed. "Certainly. But as to Mr. Ebeling—he is in the police service, you know."

"What are your duties?" asked Mr. Osborne turning to Ebeling.

"My duties?" repeated the policeman. "Well, pretty general. We are supposed to watch out for the arrival and departure of vessels, in the absence of a customs officer; to see that there is no illegal traffic in liquor or firearms with the natives; to enforce the laws of the province as to hunting and fishing and to assist those in jeopardy of their lives."

"Mr. Mellum is an Englishman," replied Mr. Osborne, "and I notify you now that it is altogether likely that he is in extreme danger. Does not your territory extend that far?"

Ebeling laughed. "A mounted policeman," he

answered, "knows neither distance nor time. I shall do what I can to protect Mellum."

"And *you*," spoke up Alan, turning to Dufour, "you 're not afraid to risk yourself with us in the aeroplane, are you?"

"I am in Mr. Osborne's service," answered the Indian. "I only await his orders."

"It 's like plannin' a parade," remarked Bob a little later as Mr. Osborne, Ebeling and he discussed the coming campaign, Ned, Alan and Dufour having hastened along shore to have a look at the aerodrome and the *White North*. "First, there is the aeroplane, the *White North*, as a sort of *avaunt courier* carrying Ned, Alan and Leon. Then comes the general on the *Aleutian*, with his aides, Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje."

"And Mr. Hayward," added Mr. Osborne. "I 'm going to take him, and, I hope, Mellum, back where it 's summer. That is one reason why I 'd like to get out this winter," he concluded. "I think those men are entitled to at least a few months of sunshine and decent food before they die. Eh, Ebeling?"

The young Englishman reached out his hand—his eyes were moist.

"If you knew how I 've longed to be able to do that for these men—"

“We ’ll do it,” exclaimed the austere capitalist, “even if we don’t find a pound of copper!”

In another half hour, the real work began. Ned and Alan returned from the aerodrome reporting nothing disturbed, and the entire party hurried to the *Aleutian*. On a line, the distance from Herschel Island to the mouth of the Coppermine was about six hundred and three miles. With three passengers, it was not possible for the *White North* to carry enough fuel to make this flight and return. Hayward and old Dufour had journeyed in their canoe nearly a week beyond the Coppermine. This probably meant one hundred and fifty miles further east.

“I hope it ’s no further,” said Ned, when it got down to the last details. “We won’t have gasoline to throw away, that ’s certain. And it ’s a sure thing we won’t come back until the *Aleutian* finds us.”

As the flight was to be mainly by compass until the mouth of the Coppermine was reached, the intervention of night made no particular difference. Ned and Alan figured on about a forty-mile-an-hour speed. At that rate, the Coppermine would be reached in about fifteen hours. Fixing upon eight o’clock in the morning as a good time

to reach this point, the hour of departure was settled at five o'clock that afternoon.

Captain McKay laid the course by compass and added a sextant and nautical almanac to the *White North* outfit. As the *Aleutian* was then in 69 degrees and 30 minutes north latitude, the north pole of the compass needle pointed nearly due east or toward the north magnetic pole on King William Island. The variation was noted and Hayward's notes were set down on an *Aleutian* chart.

Before beginning the transfer of gasoline and stores to the aerodrome, the boys overhauled their personal outfits. In this, Dufour was finally persuaded to join them. In place of his rifle, the Indian was induced to accept a carbine-automatic revolver. In ammunition, each of the aeroplane party carried seventy rounds. The lightest mess kit in the store cabin was taken, and every one had something to say about the food supply. The final selection was left to Dufour; he put aside everything but flour, salt, baking powder, salt pork and tea. For the rest, he simply patted his new firearm and smiled.

Immediately after luncheon, the *Turark*, began making trips shoreward serving as a ferry. Food, blankets, extra clothing, gasoline and oil were car-

ried up the slope, and then followed nearly every man from the two vessels in port. Factor Hayward was finally present, but, apparently, he had no interest in what was taking place.

While the spectators waited and grew restless, Ned sat in the aerodrome explaining the aeroplane to Dufour. Of course, the Indian had never seen such a craft. He listened and looked, nodding his head and asking a question now and then. Ned was thus engaged when Mr. Osborne stepped to his side, handed him a paper and showed him his watch. It was four-forty-five P. M. The boy sprang to his feet, held out his hand and grasped that of his superior.

“Remember,” he said, his face flushed with excitement, “if Mr. Hayes is on Copper Island when you get there, you ’ll find us sitting on top of him.”

There was a round of quick nervous farewells, and then the front of the canvas shed dropped. Almost at the same moment, the *White North* darted forward. The enclosed cabin concealed those aboard her. But the creak of her shifting rudder told that, inside, a sure hand was in control.

CHAPTER XVI

ACROSS THE BARREN LANDS

Ned Napier's calculation as to what weight the *White North* would carry was apparently well worked out. The three hundred gallons of gasoline and Leon Dufour's one hundred and sixty pounds seemed only to steady the machine.

"An engine without cars can't make the maximum speed," explained Ned, "any more than a freight train can. But we have the power and, so long as our engines are able to lift us, we are all the better for our extra load."

Alan was busy with the motors, and the Indian stood at the rear of the car looking from the port-hole at the island, the bay and the two steamers now fast dropping below and astern.

"How do you feel, Leon?" asked Ned, over his shoulder.

"Like a man up a tree with a bull moose beneath," answered the Indian. "Rather stay where I am than fall."

Alan called to the breed, and, telling him that he might move about, if he did it slowly, "allowin'

time for the machine to take up the slack," as he expressed it, showed him the anemometer and the barometer hanging just without the cabin door.

"You might watch them," suggested Alan. "I 'll keep the engines keyed up and Ned will do the steering." Then he explained the anemometer, and how it indicated the speed at which the car was traveling. He also told how the barometer could be read for height, and, finally, Alan loaned Dufour his watch.

"Now," he said, "if you are looking for something to do, watch these instruments and, every five minutes, announce their reading. It 'll help us to know where we are."

"Better go a little further," exclaimed Ned, who was listening intently to Alan's instructions. "Give him our old log book, and let him record the readings as he makes them. I want to hear just how fast we 're traveling, but the figures ought to be set down. If our speed varies, we can figure up later how far we 've gone."

"If you call back your compass reading each time," added Alan, "he can put that down, too. If anything happens, the speed and compass readings ought to show us just where we are at any time."

"Fine," said Ned. "Good as charting a ship's course. How are we now?"

"Nine hundred feet elevation and thirty-two miles an hour speed."

Alan looked a little puzzled, and Ned noticed it.

"Can't you remember that an airship does not get up speed while climbing? Wait till we strike our first drift tangent."

The *White North* had all the while been verging nearer the shore and already the sage-green carpet of the spruce valley west of the McKenzie was coming into detail. At its margin, the amber foam of the Arctic Sea outlined the sandy shore, while, here and there, where the forest ended in broken piles of rock, bits of water-worn ice could be seen almost hidden beneath a ragged canopy of stunted trees.

Although the aeroplane was still climbing upward, as it advanced, it came nearly over the tortuous shore line. Both Alan and Ned watched the developing panorama without comment. Since April, they had dreamed of the magic wonderland of the Great Country in which all things seemed possible, and this was their first real sight of it. Beneath the speeding car, the spruce-margined shore rose suddenly into an abrupt shelf of rock.

At its eastern end, the trees disappeared and the shelf broke into steps to the beach.

Thereon, its head erect as if alarmed, but as unmoving as bronze, the boys saw their first moose. Alan impulsively laid his hand on his revolver.

"Five-forty P. M.," exclaimed Dufour suddenly. "Eleven hundred and fifty feet elevation; speed, thirty-two miles."

"North by east," came sharply from Ned. Dufour set the figures down in the spaces he had already ruled off on the pages of the log book.

"If we were in Chicago now and headed 'north by east,'" added Ned, laughing, "we would n't miss the north pole very far. But up here, our north compass needle points almost due east."

This interruption gave Alan time to realize the folly of wantonly killing the big game beneath. A few minutes before seven o'clock, the *White North* passed almost directly over the flat, sandy island where the *Belle of Beaufort* had met Mr. Osborne. Then it was off across the hundred-mile-wide delta of the McKenzie. The gray blue sea changed to a flood of brown, and beneath them, as far as the eye could reach, lay the island-studded, marsh-like mouth of the great river. Back from the sea these bankless channels seemed

separated only by bars and battures of sand on which jams of driftwood towered in the air.

At two thousand feet elevation, Ned had laid the *White North* on an even keel and for nearly an hour the airship had been shooting ahead at a forty-mile rate. It had grown so cold that all, including Dufour, had added a Mackinac coat to their heavy sweaters and Ned had put on his gloves.

"This flour and tea and long distance game are all right," exclaimed Alan when seven o'clock had passed, and there was no suggestion of food; "but a little snack would n't go badly right now—while we 're thinkin' of deer and bears. How about a few pancakes? I 'll make 'em."

"I knew this would come," growled Ned. "You 're always hungry. You want to eat too often. Leon," he continued, turning toward the quarter-breed, "how much food did you carry when you came overland from Hudson Bay to the river?"

"Not as much as I 'd have liked," answered Dufour, with a laugh. "I had some tea and salt."

"No bread?" exclaimed Alan. "No flour?"

"The Eskimos don't even have tea," said Dufour. "And they don't often bother about salt."

Their bread is blubber. You can live on meat alone, if you have to."

The short Arctic summer was already passing. On the eleventh of August the sun rose only to 29 degrees, 12 minutes above the horizon, and there was eight hours of the twenty-four in which it was beneath the horizon, the night increasing at the rate of nearly nine minutes a day. A little after eight o'clock, the red ball of the sun, which had for hours been moving just above the horizon, fell out of sight; but the red glow hung on the sky for some time. In temperature, it was decidedly cold—even nipping.

"I expected this," added Ned. "There is some lunch over there," indicating a roll of blankets.

Alan sprang to the bundle, and at once set up a shout of joy. Yoshina had put up a lunch that looked like a banquet. A "hot bottle" held a quart of coffee, which was yet too hot to drink. With it were condensed cream, sugar and metal cups. There were stuffed olives, potted tongue, opened and wrapped in oil paper, bread and butter, sardine sandwiches made with big flat crackers and, also wrapped in oil paper, six pieces of strawberry pie. And, although Alan made all the fuss about the food, he ate no more than Ned and

Leon. He even rescued half the provender and coffee.

"We 've got a busy morning coming," he explained, "and it 'll go better then than now."

Both Ned and Alan were anxious to get as far south as possible that they might catch a glimpse of the wide, muddy McKenzie, but hardly had they had a look at the sand bars and islands of the delta before Ned laid the *White North* on its eastern course. By the time supper was eaten, even the far eastern shore of the McKenzie delta had disappeared. Gradually all sight of the ocean disappeared; and then, at last, they were over the Barren Lands. River, lake, tundra waste and forest, the panorama of the earth slid beneath them. Then, as darkness came on, the forest stretches grew less and finally dwindled into sparse, isolated trees; the big lakes diminished in size and the peaty, moss marshes adjacent to them turned from tundra to plain.

"It 's hard to see it now," explained Dufour, "but, we 're over the real Barren Lands. Beneath us, now, you might travel for miles and see no tree. Clumps of rock, uneven stony plains and now and then hills of treeless soil stretch beneath us. If we had Colonel Oje here and could drop

him, the chances are he 'd land on a musk ox or, at least, within range of one."

Dufour had maintained the watch at the instruments and the log book. At nine o'clock, Alan took charge of the levers that Ned might relax for awhile. Then Ned and Leon computed the direction and distance covered by the car. Allowing for the compass variation, the course was almost directly east by south. This record kept by Leon made it possible to calculate their advance almost to the mile. The average rate was thirty-nine miles. In the four hours, they had traveled one hundred and forty-six miles. The distance to the Coppermine was now four hundred and fifty-seven miles, or about eleven hours' flying.

The cold was benumbing, but with no particular danger of frost bite, as the temperature was sixteen above zero, and the occupants of the flying ship were well clad. But, at ten o'clock, Ned gave Dufour a cup of hot coffee and ordered him into his blankets.

"You can't do anything now, and you 've got plenty to do to-morrow."

The aeroplane was on the long, horizontal tangent, and its speed was regular. For that reason, the ten-minute records in the log were abandoned,

and Ned resumed charge of both the readings and the engines.

Ned's closest examination failed to detect a weak spot in the big, buoyant craft. Hour after hour, its motors kept up their ceaseless whirr, and, had it not been for the resistance of the cabin walls on the air, those in the *White North* might, almost, have imagined the craft held aloft by its old gas bag. There was an assurance in its motion that suggested an aerial track. Even when the operators moved, the flexing surfaces acted so promptly and effectively that none felt alarm. The wide, strong framework swayed to the movements of those in the cabin as a boat keels over and then as naturally fell back into equilibrium.

Dufour having followed orders, Alan and Ned kept silent watch for a time. About eleven o'clock, after a final inspection of the engines, the gasoline reservoirs, the oil feeds and magnetos, Ned bundled himself up and crawled close to the recumbent Indian. He had no time for bedtime thoughts. He wanted rest, and he began to get it by going to sleep at once.

Alan was now in his element. Before Ned began his snooze, he laid Alan's blanket over the latter's shoulders. And Alan now stood, as silent and unmoving as a cigar store Indian, with

his long, red and black blanket draped over his form. It was wholly dark beneath him, but the stars were out, and the sky was brilliant. Ned's last advice was to hold the course they were on.

"It would be easy to get up speed by dropping down," he said, "but we 'd lose in the end—" they were advancing at an altitude of about one thousand feet. "Keep up here until dawn. When you are at a height like this, if anything happens, you have the longest road to the ground and the best chance to make plans for lighting."

In the long, silent, frosty, starlit hours, as the *White North* held her drift, Alan imagined he could almost hear sounds from living things beneath him. At times, he was sure he heard the rush of icy rivers, and again the lap of eddies on some deep, spruce-embowered lake. The least creak of the flying machine seemed like the breaking, far below, of a twig or branch beneath the tread of a giant moose. When a hollow of the silk plane filled and thumped into place, it was as if some giant fish had sprung after prey in the night below.

Ned's complaint of Alan was that the latter lacked imagination and love of poetry. Either Alan's nature was changing, or a spell was on him this night. Dreaming of giant caribou, the musk

ox, of dawn-tinted trout and the giant l'connue, his drowsing mind ran on to other things—the human life that now and then traced a path into this unsurveyed world; the Eskimo, the Indian, and such men as old Hayward and Anatole Dufour.

He could see them, encumbered with nothing but gun and snowshoes and knife, coming silently out of the great woods to the south, and disappearing again whence they came. Why? Who could tell? The call of the wild? The lure of the unknown?

What had drawn these solitary men was now passing beneath him unseen; its waste of rock and plain, of river and lake, he could not see. But, somehow, so close to them, the boy began to smell the soil of the wonderland. No longer the salt flavor of the sea; no longer the tonic smell of spruce. Alan could not analyze it, but he knew he was over the Barren Lands at last.

Dufour spoke to the watchful boy several times to ask if he could assist in any way. But Ned, like an old sailor, took full advantage of every minute of his time off watch. In the late evening, the light wind of the north switched to the south, and, attempting to hold to his compass course, Alan had to bear up against it. In spite of this, he knew he was making a little southing

and, when Ned was called at daybreak, between three and four o'clock, the night pilot reported lost ground.

Nor was Ned able to recover it. On the contrary, rather than present a perpetual quarter to the wind, Ned immediately brought the *White North* so far about that the wind fell on its starboard quarter. Taking this advantage of the breeze, he laid a new course, aiming now only at intercepting the river at any point. At last, the sun fully lit up the world beneath, and the boys were content. They could see the Barren Lands.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WHITE NORTH FINDS LOB STICK CREEK

When the picture of the great Coppermine River finally filled out the horizon bounded circle beneath the thousand-foot-high aeroplane, the wonder-struck Airship Boys almost forgot the real purpose of their night-long flight. Here again, the spruce and the tamarack forests reappeared in the wide, odorous stretches through the center of which curved the slow, gurgling river.

As in the rivers of the southwestern United States, the Coppermine had cut its bed beneath the adjacent land, while here and there, the slow erosion of centuries had been halted, and the waters turned aside by stubborn hills of granite. These mounds, low-lying and crested by spruce, stood like islands in the sinuous bends of the Arctic-bound current.

"It 's on some of these," exclaimed Ned, pointing north and south as far as the eye could see, "that Tyrrell had located his claims. I reckon that every one of these hills is reeking with copper."

“And you can bet Mr. Hayes has annexed a few on his own hook,” added Alan. “Would ’nt it be great to come up this river on the *Belle*, and pick out a few mines ourselves.”

“You could n’t,” exclaimed Dufour. “There is n’t a fall or a rapid on the last fourteen hundred miles of the McKenzie; but Bloody Falls, almost at its mouth, would stop you on the Coppermine.”

“Not long,” answered Ned, “not more than a week anyway. We could take the *Belle* apart, and portage her sections in a few days. And what is a week up here? The Hudson Bay Company annual fleet of ‘sturgeon head’ boats takes two weeks to portage its cargo at the Athabasca ‘sixteen-mile rapids.’ It ’s just a little break in the journey when you work by seasons instead of days.”

“But what ’s the use,” answered Dufour with a smile. “What you may find here you ’ll find a hundred times better on Oomikot’s Island.”

“But every one can’t own that,” interrupted Alan. “Why don’t the prospectors fightin’ for claims over on the Yukon and down on the Great Lakes come up here where they can have what they want, and all they want?”

“That question is what put old Mr. Hayward

where he is," answered Ned. "I would n't bother about it, if I were you. But the answer is, they 've got to be operators like Mr. Osborne, to make it pay. He is n't goin' to mine his copper. He 's goin' to find where it is, and how much of it there is, and then he 's goin' to tell the copper trusts and kings a few things. When he gets ready, he can put any price on copper he likes."

"Could double it, I suppose," suggested Alan.

"Or cut it in half," added Dufour.

"Meanwhile," remarked Ned, as the aeroplane made a long, rising sweep toward the north, "we 'll follow the river to the sea. Keep a sharp lookout. We might even see Mr. Hayes and Tyrrell peckin' away prospectin' on some of their open hills. If we pick up no signs of a white man's camp, it 'll be a fair indication that they 've been here and gone."

"Lookin' for the big mine?" suggested Alan.

"Certainly," added Ned, "for we know we are not the only ones to have our heads full of the legend. It may be a little risky to do it, but I 'm going to come down nearer the river. It 's at least twenty miles to the gulf. I 'll follow the bends and you fellows use the glasses."

The *White North* had in the night drifted twenty miles to the south and crossed the river

at nine-twenty A. M. Nothing had been said, as yet, about breakfast, and the airship on her new course began its lower, graceful sweep along the chasm in the trees like a swift-footed Indian bending forward in search of game tracks. The new picture was fascinating. Alan could not repress his "Ahs" and bursts of admiration.

Game there was, many kinds; deer in profusion. Geese and ducks hurried by the big canvas bird unalarmed. It was, too, the time of flowers. Banks of these, lying between the hills and the river's edge, always aroused Alan.

"What 's the matter with you, Alan?" said Ned at last. "I never saw you loosen up so before. Must be getting sentimental."

"Sentimental nothing," retorted Alan. "It just makes me sore to see all that stuff goin' to waste. And all because people think there is nothin' but snow and ice up here. Where can a fellow get for nothin' what is waitin' for him in this land? A beautiful river full of fish, where he has a thousand miles of boatin'; a copper mine waitin' anywhere to make him rich when he needs money; a slope like that down there for his home with flowers all around it; all the wood he wants for cuttin' it, and, like as not, coal a-plenty; his

own private game preserve that can't be duplicated in the world—”

“Psst!” It was a caution from Dufour.

Alan made no attempt to finish his panegyric. The swerving car had rounded a broad bend of the river some fifteen miles from the sea. The alteration in the river course had been caused by a rocky eminence lying almost at right angles to the north and south course of the stream. On the south, this high ground sloped gradually and was fairly well covered with tamarack. But on the north, while the descent was as gradual, it was broken into three abrupt terraces. Here there was almost no vegetation, and the deflected river swept in again to rush along the foot of the hill.

There was no flat river shore, and, on that side of the stream, few trees. As the morning sun struck on the exposed terraces and rifts in the rocks, the play of lights and shadows, the loose rock, broken cleavage and occasional columns of granite, wrought a sudden picture that startled. To those familiar with mining scenes, the picture was that of a region once thick with eager prospectors. It did not require the Indian's warning to call Ned's and Alan's attention to the startling part of the view.

On the lowest terrace, bald in the bright sun, stood a new miner's tent.

"He 's here," whispered Alan.

Before Ned could speak, Dufour added:

"No, only two men are here." The car was already passing directly over the solitary tent. "White men were here. They had two larger tents near the river." The boys looked and saw beds of spruce twigs already brown in the sun. "There is a two-man canoe—Indian," went on Dufour, also pointing to the edge of the terrace where the canoe lay, bottom up.

"Mr. Hayes and Tyrrell had seven men," exclaimed Ned, excitedly. "Then the two white men and three Indians have gone ahead."

"A light crew," added Dufour. "And they did not stop long. There was only a two-days' fire between the tents."

"Then you would n't stop?" exclaimed Alan to whom the solitary tent and fantastic, rocky hill acted as a magnet. "I reckon that 's where the big claims are."

The Indian shook his head.

"Mr. Hayes got to this place as quickly as Mr. Osborne got down the river. And, while we were getting ready for this trip he was n't losing any time. He may be two or three or even four days

ahead of us now. Mr. Osborne lost two days in the delta—I 'm sorry," added the Indian.

Without a word Ned threw over his vertical lever and the great ship that had now been in the air over sixteen hours shot off across the river.

"What 's doin'?" exclaimed Alan. "Here 's the river;" and he pointed along the yellow foaming current toward the north where the haze of Arctic water was already in sight.

"No use losing time," said Ned sharply. "We want to get east as fast as possible. Goin' to cut corners."

"But the creek mouths? We 've got to count 'em," added Alan, argumentatively.

"You can count a creek by its tail as well as its mouth," answered Ned laughing. "So look out for the creek in the woods."

But there was no creek in the woods in the short cut Ned was making, and after covering what was, perhaps, a twenty-mile tangent, the shores of Coronation Gulf told them that another stage in their flight was ended.

"We missed seein' Bloody Falls and the mouth of the river," explained Ned, "and maybe we missed seein' our friends, Hayes and Tyrrell. But that 's all the better. They have n't seen us, and our cut may have put us ahead."

"Looks a good deal like Herschel Island," remarked Alan. There was a blue ice haze in the far north; a glimpse of low, brown island in the nearer waters and, along the shore, the same fringe of rock, with stunted vegetation in its crevices and now and then, yellow, foam-sprayed deposits of ice.

Dufour had been using the binoculars. As the aeroplane turned east along the rough shore line, where frozen sand yet held its fantastic shape against the August sun, the quarter-breed smiled.

"Not in sight behind," he remarked. Then his smile disappeared. "And not in sight in front."

"That being the case," said Ned, "take the wheel, Alan, and let the navigators do a little computing."

He and Dufour had maintained their readings all morning like machines. Scarcely had he taken the log book when the Indian remarked:

"What 's the use now? We 're on a track we can't miss. No matter what the book shows, we 're on the Gulf shore just east of the Coppermine. We want only six creeks—"

"Of which one is below," exclaimed Alan.

"You 're right," said Ned, promptly. "We don't need figurin' now. Let 's have breakfast."

It was nine-forty-five A. M. What had prom-

ised to be a fair sunny day was turning into a chill gray one. The sun still shone unclouded, but murkily through a sea vapor that moved in banks of mist into and out of which the *White North* sailed with increasing discomfort to those aboard her. But breakfast cheered every one.

"I always want what I can't have," said Alan. "And just now, I 'm dead hungry for flour pancakes and boiled venison." He had just sighted a bunch of deer disappearing over the rocks.

"To-night, on Oomikot," suggested Ned.

"If not deer meat," remarked Dufour soberly, "you can probably have a hunk of walrus blubber. Oomikot, you must remember, is n't exactly a meat market. And, even if Mr. Mellum is there to meet us, you must n't forget he 's hardly one of your own kind now. He 's been an Eskimo so long that he lives like one. At least," added the Indian, "it would be strange if he did n't."

"Three more," exclaimed Ned, who had been resting at full length on the cabin floor, munching a sandwich with his head and shoulders hanging out of the cabin door. "Three more creeks. That's four."

"Or number two," exclaimed Alan. "It 's one creek with three mouths. Look, Leon."

It was true. What had once been an inlet fed

from the interior by a Barren Land rivulet was now choked with driftwood from the Coppermine. In this heap of debris frozen sand had gathered until a permanent island was formed and the pent-up summer thaw was forced channels on each side of the island. On the east, the new channel had followed the shore to a pond-like depression in the rock, from which the water escaped gulfward in two places.

"It 's three mouth," pursued Ned. "And that 's four since we left the Coppermine. What do you say, Leon?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Probably one," he ventured at last. "My grandfather and Mr. Hayward passed along here fifteen years ago. There may have been only one mouth then."

"Probably," continued Ned. "But why begin assuming things?"

"You 've got to assume what good judgment tells you," argued Alan.

"We can decide it very easily," interrupted the quarter-breed. "We 'll call it three or four altogether. When we 've counted two more, we 'll have passed six. And then—"

"Pshaw," exclaimed Ned, red in the face. "Then if that 's right, the lob stick trees will be

there to confirm it. If the lob sticks are not there, we 'll be wrong. We 'll just go on a couple o' more creeks."

"Trees don't stand always," interrupted the skeptical Alan. "What if they have rotted and fallen down?"

Ned looked up blankly with no immediate answer.

"A lob stick on the ground is as good as one in the air," remarked Dufour. "I think I can find them standing or fallen. I 'll watch."

Not until nearly twelve o'clock was another stream passed. There could be no doubt about this one.

"It 's big enough to be given a name," remarked Dufour, "if it has n't one already. Look on the chart."

A quick examination was made of the best Canadian Arctic chart the *White North* carried. As the boys already knew, there was not a charted stream within two hundred miles east of the Coppermine. This river was wide and smooth. Without consulting Alan, Ned took out his pencil.

"We 've named the island on the McKenzie delta for Mr. Osborne. This must be Honeywell River."

Between twelve and one o'clock another small stream was crossed.

"If the second creek was the fourth one," exclaimed Alan at once, and somewhat sarcastically, "this one is number six. As there is n't a tree or plant in sight, where 's the lob sticks?"

"That only proves I was wrong," cheerfully answered Ned, "if that is any satisfaction to you. But, it is now twelve-fifteen. We 've been comin' east forty miles an hour. We left the Coppermine at nine-forty-five. We 've reeled off one hundred and forty miles at least. We ought to be getting somewhere."

Dufour was carefully examining the gulf to seaward, as he had done often in the last hour or so. He shook his head.

"Go ahead," he said, only. "It 's hazy, and I can't see far; but there is nothing in sight."

At one o'clock, the second longest stream emptying into the gulf shot into view, stretching like a thin crack in the brown, half frozen plain.

"Number five or number seven?" asked Alan, still hanging on to his controversy.

"Number five, of course," replied Ned. "The next station will be Lob Stick Point; change cars for Oomikot Island. Look out for your parcels and umbrellas."

While the boys were laughing, Dufour remarked:

“And we have n’t passed your white friends yet. They have n’t stopped for much rest.”

The remark startled the boys into silence. Finally Alan suggested:

“They may be behind us now, you know.”

“But,” said Ned, instantly by way of revenge, “while you are assuming things, you can as easily assume that they ’re ahead and givin’ us a race.”

“They only had a canoe,” began Alan. But at that instant Dufour stretched his arm ahead. On the horizon, the gulf shore rose into rocks once more and on these could be made out the green and brown of a few trees. Five minutes later, the *White North* passengers were abreast the mouth of a thin stream of melted snow trickling into the gulf. On its banks rose, withered and barren of life, three slender spruce trunks—the lob sticks. The Indian nodded.

The canoe of Messrs. Hayes and Tyrrell was not in sight.

CHAPTER XVIII

THROUGH THE CRATER ON OOMIKOT ISLAND

Ned had been at the levers for some time when, turning them over to Alan, he grasped the binoculars and fixed his eyes on the North—the vague unmapped North where should lie the lode stone of the *Aleutian's* Arctic flight, the battered, bleak life of land wherein was lodged the great mystery, the secret of the White Eskimos. But, even with the powerful glasses, only a bank of mist rose before him.

“What 's the use o' workin' ourselves into a fret,” began Alan. “We don't know that Mr. Hayes knows about the island,” he said. “If he is only lookin' for it, he may be miles ahead to the east, still snoopin' around in the bays and inlets. Unless you know it 's there,” concluded Alan, jerking his head gulfward, “you could pass it by easily enough. You certainly can't see it.”

“But he knows it now,” interrupted Dufour, pointing to the mouth of Lob Stick Creek. “The people down there are either coming or going from the island—that 's sure.”

“What people ” exclaimed the two boys together.

“Those behind the rocks who have forgotten to hide their big canoe and their three kayaks.”

“Maybe it ’s Hayes and Tyrrell,” suggested Alan.

“Hardly,” answered the observing Dufour. “They would not use kayaks and this canoe comes from the east. It ’s a sea boat, not a Coppermine canoe.”

“Turn her,” shouted Alan. “Let ’s make a landing. We can find out. Come on.”

Instead, Ned reached over and took the levers once more. To Alan’s surprise, when Ned altered the *White North’s* course, it was to turn the craft seaward.

“What ’s the use?” Ned answered. “If they passed this way without meeting these metal buyers and are not on the track of the island, but gone on along the coast, that won’t change our plans. It ’s our business to get to Oomikot just as soon as the aeroplane ’ll carry us there.”

“And if they have passed this way and met the metal buyers,” repeated Dufour soberly and significantly, “and *are* on the track of the island, they are somewhere out there in the mist.”

Alan looked at Ned, his face a picture of new

alarm. As the dipping air craft careened in its swinging, circle turn, and then continued toward the west, he was about to ask why, when he suddenly understood.

"Line 'em up, Leon," said Ned, as the aeroplane, continuing its swing, approached the mouth of the creek (he had allowed the machine to drop considerably in its complete circle) "and when the lob sticks on the west bank are in line, give me the word."

Almost feverish with excitement, Alan took station at the rear post behind the Indian and squinted for a sight of the trees in line. On the turn, the car moved slowly, and at the proper moment, the two observers sang out together:

"Hold her."

"West by east $\frac{1}{2}$," responded Ned, as he laid the aeroplane on that course. "Which means, allowing for our variation, north by east $\frac{1}{2}$."

"And which means, too," added Alan, "that in three-quarters of an hour we 'll know a whole lot. If we draw a blank, we 'll be in luck to get back to the shore and to those scared natives who own the kayacks. Just remember, my boy," he added significantly to Ned, "we 've already done nearly eight hundred miles since we left the *Aleutian*."

"We are n't comin' back," answered Ned, with

his usual cheery laugh. "We 're goin' to stop out at Oomikot for the *Aleutian*."

"Yes, I know," interrupted Alan. "But, meanwhile, you must keep in mind that we have n't seen Oomikot yet."

"Then you 'd better get busy and look out for it. We are n't going to change this tack till we come to it, or—"

"Or what?" repeated Alan.

"Or we run out of gasoline. Get busy," laughed Ned. "Stand by to raise Oomikot, the island that looks like a hat. Now," he added, turning to Dufour, "you 'd better resume your log again. If anything does happen out here, we ought to know where we are. It 'll at least give us the bearings of Oomikot's crater."

While Alan with the glasses sat just outside the starboard opening of the cabin, Dufour at his old post renewed his observations. With Ned at the levers, the *White North* soon had the shore line well to the rear. As it finally disappeared, Alan remarked:

"I suppose you realize that this is the first time the aeroplane has been out of sight of land—in spite of our polar experience."

"Oh," exclaimed Ned, cheerfully, "a thing 'll come a fellow's way if he waits long enough."

Luck 's turned our way. All we got to do now is to keep her goin'."

There was a peculiar sort of grunt from Dufour.

"I 'm not so sure about your 'luck'," he said in a slow voice. "At least, don't believe that's all you need this day. Everything indicates that Mr. Osborne's rivals have come up the Coppermine and are searching for the big mine. They are somewhere now, possibly, between the Lob Stick Creek and Mr. Mellum's island. If—"

"If what?" broke in Alan.

"If they have n't reached it already. If they have, don't count it good luck. If they have not, and you get there before they do, why then, good luck? Yes."

For some time the boys made no comment. Dufour's words required no answer. Somehow the lads did not seem able to realize that the failure to catch sight of Hayes and Tyrrell might spell disaster as well as good fortune. The boys, being young, did not always look around the corner. But Dufour, ever alert and thoughtful, as must be the solitary man of the woods who in security takes heed of danger and who in plenty provides for the coming want, saw much that was ominous to him.

Finally, after perhaps twenty minutes of

straightaway flight, Alan let out a whoop of joy and shouted:

“There she is; there ’s old Oomikot, or I can’t see straight.”

The thoughtful Indian’s jaw fell. He found no cause for rejoicing in that discovery. He had never doubted but that the island would appear just where it did. He wanted to meet, pass over and beat Hayes and Tyrrell to the island.

In the long years that Oomikot and his people had lived there and in the years that Mellum had stood solitary guard over the treasure, no white man but Hayward and Dufour’s grandfather had set foot on the crater rock. Eskimos had gone and come and Mellum had lived on from middle manhood to hoary age, waiting for the message that was to make him rich and take him back in luxury to the land he had known as a child.

That message had not come. Dufour was fearful of two things. Hayes was a man who knew men. He also probably knew the story of the wealth that was Mellum’s. If Hayes met the broken warder of the priceless mine, how long would it take the wily Alaskan to buy Mellum’s interest? And, once in possession of the island, where was the law in that end of the world to protect Dufour’s rights? As for pathetic, stricken

Hayward—his voice and claim were perhaps stilled forever.

And, if Mellum were dead! This possibility was even more disconcerting to Dufour. Mellum, so far as known, had no heirs. All Hayward's and Dufour's interests came through the Arctic survivor. With the old man dead, there would be left not even a record of a white man's claim. Alaska Lew could squat on the island as he had pre-empted the Big Plateau claims on the Coppermine. The metal would be his on payment of royalty to the crown. These were the thoughts that made the Indian say:

"The crown of the volcano lies toward us. On the far side of the island is the low breach. Do not wait to circle the island. See—" as he said this, he reached forward impulsively and caught the glasses from Alan's hands—"they are here," he exclaimed, almost catching his breath. "Just at the point," he added thickly, "a black spot!"

Alan looked, but it was a few moments before his eyes picked up the object Dufour had seen.

"That 's right," he said, at last. "You did n't see that with the naked eye?" he asked, whirling toward the Indian.

"There was but one place to look," Dufour answered quickly. "I watched and thought I saw.

Now," he continued, forcibly, "it is gone. It was a boat. It has disappeared behind the point. We must beat the men in that boat to Mellum's house. Or," and he spoke significantly in a low tone, "to his claim, and hold it. If they beat us, they are perhaps four or five to our three, and they 'll have possession. We 've got to beat them."

"Over the crater," said Ned, suddenly and positively. "Then, I 'll head straight down for the buildings on the rim of the volcano. I may not be able to stop the aeroplane," he continued decisively, "but both of you be ready. I 'll make a low flight. At Mellum's, drop off, both of you. I 'll get back, some way—either in the machine or on foot."

The Indian breathed hard and smiled. Alan was already peeling off his Macinac coat in spite of the freezing temperature.

"Sounds like somethin' doin', at last," he almost chuckled. "If Dufour and I can't hold a stone house against two other white men, we deserve to lose."

"You forget that there are two more men, at least," added Dufour soberly.

"Eskimos!" remarked Alan, with some scorn in his voice.

"At that," said Dufour, "they are worth reck-

oning. But, in this case, they are not Eskimos. Like enough, they are Loucheux, men of my own race."

"That makes a difference, of course," said Alan. "But anyhow, I think we can do it—don't you?"

"We 're here to try it, at least," answered Dufour.

The island lay dead ahead and about three miles distant. As the almost imperceptible boat, which all on the aeroplane now confidently believed held Alaska Lew and Tyrrell, dropped out of sight, Ned threw up his forward lever and began a slight ascent. The diameter of the island was not over two and one-half miles and he wanted the earliest view he could get of what he was to expect on the other side of the crater rim.

From where they now were, the body of the island appeared to rise directly from the choppy sea. But, as the *White North* rapidly overhauled the dead volcano peak, it could be seen that there was a flat, stony shore.

"A half mile wide," Dufour explained, "but there 's no approach up the crater from this side."

This left a crater pit not much less than a mile and a half wide. The northeastern slope of this,

the rim rising in places to eight hundred feet as they afterwards found, had broken and slipped beachward. By way of the shelf or plateau at this point, was the only easy access to the crater basin and the lava pits within. And, on this level, open only to the northeast winds, according to the legend of Hayward and Dufour, was to be found old Oomikot's settlement. There, unless he was dead, should be found the stone house of the one who was "waiting and watching in the land God's forgot"—the last and sole survivor of the Franklin Expedition—Joel Mellum.

"Make all your preparations," urged Ned. "We won't have any time to think it over after I pass the crater rim. If I can make out a habitation of any kind, I'll head directiy for it. And if the spot we saw was a boat and if Mr. Hayes was in it, he's seen us comin'. He'll be on the lope for the same spot. If I see a house that looks like Mellum's, or if I see a white man that fits his description, I'll make that way like a hawk. Like as not, I won't be able to stop without smashin' the machine."

"You give us the word when you reach your low point," exclaimed Alan—"just yell, 'Jump!' Leave the rest to us. You look out for the *White*

North. We may need it again," he added significantly.

The island breakers, crested with yellow foam, rose before them. Alan and Dufour were ready. Each had two revolvers and his full allotment of ammunition.

"And remember," added Dufour, "we may find an empty house; Mellum may be dead or gone. After you drop us, get to the rear. We may want you badly before long."

"Oh, I 'll be there, never fear," answered Ned promptly. "You can count on me."

"I want to count on food, too," said the Indian. "It may easily come to that. If Mellum is dead, we 'll find a barracks, but, like as not, no food."

Before Ned could make answer, the aeroplane silently and swiftly shot over the eight-hundred-foot wall of the volcano. Instantly the panorama of Oomikot Island flashed into view. Not so much, at first, like a hole in the ground as a deep circular valley, basin-like. Here and there, one rapid glance showed many depressions within the dead crater, secondary depths marked with crumbled walls of lava and stone, deep within which lay white blotches of yet unmelted snow and ice, the brown of granite and the white of frost



Edgar H. Snodgrass

. "HOLD ON, BOTH OF YOU. DON'T DROP."

with no spear of vegetation and no sign of animal life.

Three pairs of alert eyes swept the far side of the crater, and almost together three voices whispered, "There." Almost at right angles to their course, more east than northeast, each watcher had caught sight of the break in the wall. Instantly, the aeroplane responded and headed for the gap, "dipping" as it did so, to reach a lower tangent of flight.

"We can't see," snapped Ned. "We 'll be on it in a minute. Get ready."

Alan and Dufour sprang outside, one on each side of the cabin, and each lowered himself to the open section floor. On its new tangent the aeroplane seemed to increase its speed. Ned's tense face seemed to be disturbed by some sudden fear. His lips twitched. Unexpectedly, he yelled:

"Hold on, both of you. Don't drop. You 'll kill yourselves. We 're goin' forty miles an hour. I'm goin' to stop. *I 've got to*—smash up or not."

Hardly more than a minute had elapsed since they passed into the crater, and now the gap seemed almost directly ahead.

"See anything, Dufour?" panted Ned.

"No. But it 's there, I know."

"Shut off," exclaimed Ned excitedly, his hands

gripping the control levers. With but a second's hesitation, Alan threw himself into the cabin and cut off the power.

"Now, get ready," again ordered Ned as the whirring propellers began to slacken, "and follow orders."

Although the unswaying airship still held steadily to her course, all could feel the slackening speed. Still, nothing appeared ahead but an empty gap through which rose a horizon of distant Arctic sea. To further control the terrific speed of their descent, Ned gave the settling aeroplane a little "lift." As he did so, the sea horizon glimpsed through the gap, fell, and a ridge rose on the outward slope of the gap.

The *White North* lunged forward, halted on its new rise, and those in it saw that the new ridge was but a jumble of jagged rock caught on the crater side. But there was no sign of habitation or of man. Then the crater walls towered on each side of the advancing airship, and the *White North* was headed directly into the gap. As its lessening flight drew it nearer the jagged bottom of the gap, Alan could control his nervousness no longer.

"I don't see a thing," he whispered.

"Get ready," came from Dufour in the section on the far side of the cabin.

"Wait," persisted Ned.

The approach to the sea was so interrupted with rocks and ravines that it was plain the men with whom they were racing might be near at hand and yet unseen. Then the aeroplane was wholly in the gap. Not even the roughest path indicated the presence of man or beast. As the sea horizon widened and Ned saw that the descent to the beach just ahead was nothing but a mass of granite slabs and lava fragments, he instinctively altered his course to the right or south to find, if possible, a bit of smoother slope for landing.

Almost instantly, he yelled again, "Wait!" Alan and Dufour, without answer, but breathing hard, did as ordered. But Ned's order came just in time. The Indian and Alan were just about to let go. Although the *White North* was within fifteen feet of the ground, Ned gasped: "Wait. I'll make it."

The forward rudder had been thrown up and the rear guide had flashed over like a yacht's helm. Shaken with the new jar, the aeroplane trembled, careened to the right, and then, with one last burst of its momentum, slowly mounted once more.

"We can make it," gasped Ned. "Hold on."

With a quick, sharp turn to the right, the *White North* rose once more, hung for a moment in the air and then settled slowly forward and downward. She was hovering over the shoulder of a little plateau almost hidden at the right of the gap. The front of this shelf dropped a hundred feet or more, like a wall, to a granite chaos beneath. And on its ledge, not over five hundred yards deep, all three boys had caught, at the same moment, the sight of a spiral of smoke.

“Jump,” snapped Ned, at last. Instantly Alan and Dufour dropped from the airship frame which hung on the edge of the precipice like a tired bird seeking foothold. As the quarter-breed and the boy fell on the rocky shelf and tumbled forward, their limbs numb and stiff from nearly twenty-four hours inactivity, the *White North*, its momentum wholly gone, finished its flight. As it crashed on its granite hold and Ned sprang to the plateau, he found the rear rudders and the end of the starboard plane hanging over an unscalable chasm.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT STRUGGLE IS ON

With one glance to satisfy himself that the aeroplane was safe—temporarily at least—Ned stumbled and leaped forward over the rocks in pursuit of his companions.

The niche in the crater side on which the *White North* had managed to find precarious lodgment, was a shelf formed by some revolt of nature. Ice, the force of the one-time volcano or an earthquake, had dislodged a giant cleavage in the side of the crater about four hundred feet above sea level. This section of broken granite and crusted lava had been hurled, as if by a Titanic force, from its bed and deposited at the base of the volcano in heaps of rock and scoria.

At each end of the shelf-segment, the face of the volcano dropped almost precipitately. In the center, and verging to the south, the greater amount of loosened material had been heaped in a dizzying causeway of crater fragments. On this, if at any point, access on foot must be had to the level refuge above.

And in this, beyond question, a pathway of some sort must lead to the beach far below. For, as Ned floundered out of the mass of loose rock caught on the rim of the unique plateau, he saw Dufour and Alan headed directly toward the deepest part of the shelf. There, about half way to the towering wall of the big crater, all could make out a settlement of some kind.

The thin line of smoke rose straight skyward, protected on three sides by the upper volcano heights. It came from a stone structure, oblong in shape, with a flat roof. At one end the smoke ascended from a rough stone chimney. A smaller stone structure north of this appeared to be a continuation of the larger house. There was no sign of life.

To the left, or south, as the boys and the Indian rushed toward the structures, another building could be made out, apparently separate and partly concealed by the house of the smoke. Behind this building, but on the volcano face, was another regular crude, hut-like heap of stones.

"The smoke," yelled Ned to Alan and Dufour who were well ahead of him. "Make for the smoke."

But this was already the plan of the Indian and his boy companion, and Ned saw with satisfaction

that they would soon reach the large house. As he sprang forward, he could not resist the temptation to turn his eyes on the steep, rough causeway of lava fragments dropping from the distant center of the ledge front. Up this, Mr. Hayes, or the occupants of Dufour's "black speck," must come. If others were racing for the settlement on the ledge, they had either passed that way already and were now safe in the silent buildings, or they must at that instant be scrambling for footholds on the mountainous trail.

Dufour and Alan had almost reached the stone house. Curiosity got the better of Ned. Altering his panting course, he turned toward the head of the causeway. Reaching the bulging brow of the ledge, he suddenly had a new and wider view of the beach far below. A deep indentation in the shore line suggested an open harbor. On the sand, he was certain he could make out the brown hull of a long boat. From a single mast, flapped what seemed to be a sail. But not a human being was in sight.

Then, slackening his speed, Ned began to examine the rocky way beneath. Somewhere in its gullies and heaps of scoria, he was sure white men were making their way upward. Or, had they already achieved the summit? Not pausing—being

once more in the rugged debris of the ledge rim—Ned hastened on, only slackening his pace to peer with straining eyes into the chaos beneath.

Suddenly there was a rasping rustle down below and then a dead thud as if moving fragments had dislodged a larger rock. Man or animal was certainly moving there. The palpitating boy caught his breath and stopped short. A strained, muffled sound reached his ear. It was a human voice, unmistakably. Before Ned could move forward again, a moving, gray object caught his eye above a shoulder of rocks. It was a hat—a *white man's* hat.

They had won. Hardly able to suppress a shout of joy, Ned fell backwards, sprang to his feet once more and then, forgetting his exhaustion, ran toward the distant house. For a few moments, he did not look behind. Half way to the house of smoke, he turned and glanced over his shoulder. On the brink of the ledge, as if they had just reached the higher land, stood three men. Two more were just appearing from the rocky defile.

Two men were undoubtedly white—the others were Indians. Ned's face was tense with excitement. What was to follow? The answer came instantly. The boy did not realize at once what it meant. Then his heart thumped and his blood

seemed to chill. As he heard a sharp thud on the ground just ahead of him, he saw a puff of white smoke in front of the white-hatted man. As this flashed on his eye, the quick crack of a revolver sounded. The man had fired at him.

For the moment, Ned had no thought of returning the shot. Alarmed, he sprang again toward the spot where Dufour and Alan had disappeared some minutes before. Then, the viciousness of the unprovoked attack came to Ned. His cold face turned hot and, as he lunged forward in flight, his hand felt for his own weapon. If a struggle was to turn the meeting on the ledge into a tragedy, it must be made two-sided.

The flying boy had forgotten the cold in his race from the brink of the ledge. When the cowardly act of shooting at him in flight fully mastered him, he set his teeth, precipitately drew his automatic revolver and whirled about. He heard another explosion as he did so, and saw another ball of white. Then his own weapon snapped. He waited, his heart beating wildly, but there was no sign that his shot had found a mark. His revolver still in the air, he fired once more, and then turned and made a final dash for the stone house.

As he did so, he was not surprised to see the members of the group behind him break into a

charge forward. But he was now near the house and his two companions. What had they found there? What was he to find? Then, once again his heart thumped. He was at last facing the silent structure. There was still no sign of life there. Where were his companions? Four shots had sounded in the Arctic silence. Why had not Alan and Dufour appeared to learn the cause? Had anything happened to them?

The front of the stone house now rose immediately in front of the desperate boy. Still there was neither sound nor sight of life. Then an appalling realization flashed upon the stumbling lad! There *was no door* in the wall facing him! In a flash, Ned saw only two openings—each about ten inches square—apparently windows made with semi-transparent skins. And even these, one at each end of the wall, were six feet from the ground.

A bullet splintered the hard wall, and Ned, almost without thought, dashed towards the nearest corner of the house—the south end. He was conscious that his pursuers were already taking advantage of his discovery. They were swerving in the same direction. Then he heard a sharp admonition.

“Stop! Stop, or I ’ll shoot to kill.”

As Ned's hands grasped the rough corner of the house and helped draw him around the structure, he knew that it was the man in the white hat calling. With three more leaps, the stumbling boy had reached the rear corner of the house. As he fell behind the protection, he gasped for breath. But escape was at hand. From the rear face, a rough stone wall extended from the center of the house at right angles. Five or six feet from the building, it turned sharply to form an L. Driftwood weighted with heavy stones formed the roof of a crude entranceway within which Ned saw a heavy skin curtain hanging in place of a door. There was an entrance here at least.

Ready to spring for it, the boy's fear again gave way to indignation. Grasping his automatic anew, he threw his head and arm around the corner of the house and fired, almost without taking aim. His pursuers were in the open, the foremost nearly at the far corner of the house. In another moment, Ned was within the protecting wall, his back pressed against the swaying skin door, and his right arm free.

As he stumbled into place, his revolver rose again, waiting for the first of his pursuers. It was the man in the white hat. As his big, alert form shot around the house, his revolver arm

reached forth like a death menace. The owner did not pause to aim. Even before the foremost pursuer's companions came into sight, the big white man's revolver exploded again. The bullet sent the shattered rock into a shower over Ned's head.

The act threw the man off his balance. As he checked himself and his eyes raised towards Ned's position of advantage, the grim-faced pursuer saw the boy's revolver dead upon him. It was like murder. But, when Ned saw the man's weapon shift again like a snake's head, he could not hesitate. Out of his dark retreat, Ned's revolver spoke in answer.

The man, still staggering forward, lunged one more step, and then, his outstretched arms dropping like loose handles, the form sank sideways to the ground, and the man's big white hat rolled like a hoop to Ned's feet. Impulsively, the horror-stricken but determined boy caught the hat and tossed it toward his victim's collapsed body. But in the act, quickly as it was performed, he saw, in the crown of the expensive piece of head-gear, three initials of gold: "L. E. H."

It was the hat of L. E. Hayes, or Alaska Lew, Mr. Osborne's rival and enemy. Ned's worst fears had been realized. The contest was on. And there was no question concerning its charac-



HE SAW A PUFF OF SMOKE IN F'RONT OF THE WHITE-
HATTED MAN.

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ter. Mr. Hayes and the man with him meant to win at any cost. To them, bloodshed was nothing. If Mr. Hayes had fallen fatally injured, the odds so far were with the airship party.

But there was no belief in Ned's mind that the fight was over. Even as Mr. Hayes' hat went flying above its prostrate owner, those in the chase with him swarmed about their fallen leader. At sight of the prostrate man, there was momentary panic. The wounded man was making desperate efforts to regain his feet. The hesitation that this caused on the part of his companions, enabled Ned to draw his second revolver.

"Take him away," came in a sharp command from the alcove.

Tyrrell and three Indians glanced toward the recess only to see two revolvers covering them.

"Take him away, or I 'll fire," added the now cool-headed lad in a way that convinced the other white man he had better obey. Throwing their arms about the agony-stricken Hayes—Ned could see the latter set his teeth—the pursuers slowly withdrew. Hayes' white face lay on the shoulder of one of the Loucheux Indians. His nerveless hands still gripped his revolver. And, strong even in his extreme pain, with his other hand, the wounded man motioned feebly for his hat. On the

right side of his gray Macinac coat just above the waist line a widening blot of blood told where Ned's bullet had lodged. His jaws taut with pain and grit, Alaska Lew turned his head toward the boy in the alcove. A brutal smile relaxed his drawn lips, and he exclaimed, with an effort, but distinctly:

"I 'll see you later, Kid."

The group escorting the wounded man hesitated a moment, and then Ned saw Hayes nod his head toward the building a little to the rear and south of the stone house. In that direction, Hayes was carried, assisting as well as he could in his pain. Not until his pursuers were well up the little rise of ground, did Ned move. Then, as Tyrrell and the Indians disappeared within the doorless opening in the barracks-like building to which they had retreated, the anxious boy's lip quivered.

Where were his companions? Only a few moments had elapsed since he left them at the abandoned aeroplane. They should be within the house at his back, or near by. Why had they not responded to the fusilade of shots? Why had they not hurried to his assistance? His throat thick with apprehension, Ned turned and pushed aside the heavy skin curtain.

In the almost dark, low compartment, he made

out no living form. The stench of half-frozen food, the sickening odor of furs and skins and the rancid, suffocating smoke from a big stone blubber lamp, which escaped only in part through a chimney opening, struck his nostrils and made him gasp for breath. Stooping, he stepped into the long room. In all parts, except near the smoking blubber stove, it was a confusion of many things unknown to the boy. Nor had he time to do more than realize that no one was within.

Almost sick with apprehension, the alarmed boy rushed from the nauseating atmosphere of the place. Old Joel Mellum was not there. Alan and Dufour were not there. As Ned reached the entrance alcove again, he saw, standing before the barracks where Hayes had been taken, one of the Loucheux Indians. It recalled him to fresh alarm. Mr. Hayes' words were not idle ones. Ned knew that he could not escape renewed attack. If he must meet it alone, how was he to do it?

Not by standing still, certainly. Hurrying outside the alcove, he ran to the rear of the protection. He found a dead wall, the windowless side of the house. Neither Alan nor the Indian was in sight. Further beyond was what he had first reckoned as a continuation of the larger building.

Now, he found on a hasty examination, it was a separate building.

This structure was scarcely four feet above the ground, but about twelve feet wide by twenty feet long. The top was arched in Eskimo igloo fashion, and formed of many carefully selected stones. The only entrance was through a curved, stone tunnel, made in imitation of an Arctic snowhouse storm break. Where else could his friends be? Dropping on his knees, Ned peered within. It was dark. But, instead of the thick, foul atmosphere of the big house, the air smelt cold and clean. The agitated boy thought quickly. To enter the vaulted, stone structure was like burning his bridges behind him. One unarmed could hold him prisoner indefinitely. There were, apparently, no other apertures of admission. But the boy's needs were desperate. Hesitating a moment, he stuck his head within the tunnel-like aperture, and called Alan's name. There was no answer except a hollow reverberation of the anxious boy's voice.

But, as he lingered undetermined what to do, Ned started and then called again—this time sharply, and repeating the names of both companions. Beyond question, there was a depth to the echo that came from more than the surface enclo-

sure. As if from far in the earth, the reverberations of his voice came back in thick echoes that seemed carried along shafts or tunnels.

Perhaps, venturing into this place of mystery, Alan and Dufour had met with accident, or were in peril. Chilled with this thought, Ned forgot all else, and, throwing himself on the ground, wriggled into the narrow tunnel. As he did so, Randolph Tyrrell, Hayes' companion, sprang from the far side of the big house. With one crushing thrust of his heavily booted foot, he turned the tunnel entrance into a wreck of stone. Ned was trapped.

CHAPTER XX

HOUSE OF THE LAMP

Ned's head and shoulders were just within the vaulted, box-like stone structure when he heard the crash of the falling tunnel behind him. There was an impulse to attempt a retreat, and the boy had just endeavored to twist his crawling body about for that purpose when a second jar followed. The outer portion of the semi-circular passageway was instantly closed, and, with the second crash, Ned realized that his imprisonment was not due to accident.

"They would n't do it," thought Ned, meaning his friends. "And whoever did do it wants to keep me here or bury me in the ruins."

He pulled himself out of the crumbling passageway into the low-roofed room. Within, it was almost dark, but, as the intruder—yet on his hands and knees—examined his surroundings, he noticed that thin streaks of light penetrated through the roof. This peculiarity attracted him first. As the rays appeared at regular intervals, it was ap-

parent that the openings were not chance apertures.

“They ’re for ventilation,” thought Ned. Then he noticed that the ventilated roof was black and sooty. “Or,” added the boy, “to provide a draft.”

The roof was made of thin stones set in arch style—mortarless but so carefully adjusted as to afford a solid dome. At the apex of the arch, and at intervals of about two feet, the slabs had been omitted, and small square stones substituted in their places. These omissions could not be noticed from without, but, from within, the line of gaps, each about a foot long by two inches wide, afforded perceptible means of lighting or ventilating the otherwise tightly walled apartment.

The discovery surprised Ned, but it was not this that astounded him. Afraid to attempt to retreat and almost distracted over the cause of his new peril, the waning afternoon sun at once revealed a new danger from which he had just escaped. The floor of the interior of the hut was not flush with the plateau outside. Just within the entrance, where Ned yet crouched on his knees, the alarmed lad saw that the floor dropped about two feet. What he saw here, what he tried to see on the ends of the vaulted place and what he feared

constantly from renewed attacks on the outside, set his head in a whirl. But, as no further sign of attack reached him from without—just then—Ned focused his mind on what was before him.

The bottom of the vault was in two parts. That of the depressed floor was crudely paved with slabs of stone. This was the south end. Next the south wall, extending well across the depression, was an Eskimo sleigh. Even in the half light, it was easily discernible to the eye. On this low, ivory shod vehicle, was a long object tightly wrapped in furless skins. A dead body—a mummy! The boy knew this at once, and without further examination.

Just above this, and reaching completely from wall to wall, was an Eskimo kayak, or one-man boat. The usual black, oily finish on this had disappeared and the dried seams were gaping. The skin-bound corpse and the sleigh were partly in the shadow of the kayak. Ned made no attempt at close examination, but his eye could not fail to notice a feature of the kayak. The circular opening on its top was a jointed hoop of carved ivory.

In front of these objects and lying on the stone floor, was a heap of defensive weapons and fishing and hunting apparatus: spears, harpoons and knives. All were of copper or ivory. Toward

the center of the cave-like room and near the end of the stone paved section (in which it was firmly imbedded) rose a post or pedestal about four feet high. This, at least, was not grewsome, and Ned made a hasty examination of the object.

As he at once suspected, it was a totem pole—small, but beautifully carved. At its base, rested a circular stone at least three feet in diameter. And on this, in a thick bed of frozen blubber and oil, sat a stone bowl or lamp. The face of the totem was encrusted with smoke and soot, apparently from this, and another look about the place told how, in years, the small flickering flame of this lamp had also left its grimy coating on the roof and walls.

But these things had to be seen in hurried glances. In spite of the crust of soot and smoke, and in spite of the sinew-tied sleigh and decayed kayak—to say nothing of the skin-wrapped body, the air was fresh and wholesome. Before Ned saw it, he knew that the far end of the apartment was open—that it had no floor.

As he leaned over the totem head and saw nothing but black beyond, he hurriedly felt for a match and struck it. What he saw was not an excavation made by man. It was an irregular gap in the rocky surface of the plateau as if the top of some

lower opening had fallen in. Ned's match flickered and, just as it went out, the boy saw the smoke of it instead of rising was drifting downward into the hole.

Almost forgetting his peril, he struck another match and dropped down on the edge of the hole. Then he saw, for the first time, a crude ladder, a worn tree trunk with notches in its side. The ladder led into a shaft or tunnel which ran north and south under the remarkable house. As the flame of the match again touched his fingers and he dropped it into the lower passageway, the smoke and flame darted north. It was a tunnel with a draft. That meant an outlet somewhere.

As Ned sank back on his heels, he realized that his hands were trembling. He had experienced and seen so much in the last few minutes that he knew he was getting "rattled". With an effort, he collected his wits and rose to his feet.

"Alan and Dufour did not come this way," he reasoned swiftly. "They would n't venture down there knowing that I was alone outside."

Then he looked about again. "Anyway," he continued, "I 've found something—Oomikot's temple and grave, and, I 'll bet," he said to himself, turning again toward the pit, "one way, at

least, to his mine; and that 's something to know, if I can get out of here with a whole skin."

The side walls were thick and laid solidly. The vaulted roof was lighter, but to dislodge it in any one place would probably bring the whole structure—tons of rocks—toppling down on his head. He returned to the semi-circular tunnel entrance. Five feet within the little gallery, a jumble of rocks met him. He was effectively blocked that way.

As the boy again drew back from this choked egress, he realized that it was rapidly growing much colder. In desperation, he made another tour of the apartment, hoping to find a place of attack on the walls. But nothing of this sort seeming practicable, he turned to the center of the room once more, and with another match made a second examination of the totem.

His eye again fell on the stone lamp. He saw that it was half full of frozen oil and that a wick of twisted moss was embedded in the hard material. Without much purpose, he attempted to light the wick. After a second trial, the glowing match thawed some of the hard oil, and the moss began to burn with a soft, crackling splutter. As the flame increased and sent out a little glare of light

and a feeble glow of warmth, Ned became interested.

With his knife, the entrapped boy began digging bits of frozen, dirty fat from the bed of grease collected on the circular stone. These he piled in the lamp basin and, at last, as the increasing flame thawed more and more of the fat, the long disused temple lamp began blazing vigorously. So engrossed had Ned become in his occupation, that, in his boyish eagerness, he forced the flame until its heat became quite perceptible. When he suddenly felt a trickle of perspiration on his nose, he threw himself back on his hands to watch the play of fantastic shadows in the sombre room. That quick movement undoubtedly saved his life.

Just as Ned tossed his body backwards, a deafening roar filled the chamber, a shower of powdery splinters flew into the boy's face, and the newly lighted lamp was extinguished by a terrific concussion. When the lad was able to think, he found himself against the wall of the room with the odor of gunpowder filling his nostrils. His first thought was that something in the lamp had exploded. Then a noise overhead explained all.

Attracted by the escaping smoke of the greasy flame, some one on the outside had mounted to the roof of the chamber and discovered the openings

in the apex of the vault. Peering within, this person had been able to make out the figure of the boy busy over the lamp, and that person had shot through the opening just above the lamp.

“Well,” thought the frightened boy, composing himself as well as he could, “he did n’t ‘get me’, anyway. As I don’t need the old lamp anyway, I reckon they won’t get another chance.”

The boy even began to smile. But, a moment later, the smile disappeared. Almost before the cooped-up lad had time to think about the best hiding place to escape a chance shot in the dark, he heard a heavy blow on the roof as of a man’s boot. Then, almost immediately, there was a succession of sharp attacks as if some one were pounding with a rock. The roof seemed to withstand the assault, but Ned realized at once that, when the break came, the entire vault top would probably collapse into a chaos of tons of rock. To be caught beneath it meant instant death.

It was necessary to think but a moment. There was but one possible way of escape—the tunnel. Where it might lead meant nothing now. It was at least protection against being crushed and suffocated. With a throbbing heart, the desperate boy felt his way back to the mouth of the pit. As he touched the ladder, he hesitated and looked

above. It was now almost wholly dark within the sunken room, but Ned could still make out the little rectangles of light in the roof.

A splinter of stone fell from the arch and hit the paved floor with a ringing sound. This was the beginning. In a moment, another would come, and then another. Finally, like the trickle in the river embankment where the drops run into the torrent of the crevasse, the avalanche would follow. There was no escape except the chance of the tunnel. While he paused with another glance at the waning day above him—not knowing when he might see it again, another falling bit of rock hit the lamp hearth.

It gave the frightened boy an idea. Dropping to the floor, he extended his body silently toward the totem pole and reaching around it, grasped the still warm stone lamp. Drawing this to him, he caught it to his breast and dropped his legs into the shaft behind him. At that moment, a break of twilight seemed to fill the black tinted room and a wide section of the vaulted roof struck the floor like another explosion. Ned's feet sought in vain for the niches in the side of the tree trunk ladder, and then, from side to side of the stone structure, an entire width of the arched roof sank down. Another roar filled the room, and into the

darkness, the boy saw a man's legs follow the falling rock.

There was an oath from the man which arose even above the rush and clatter of falling debris. Dark as it was in the cave-like room, the dislodged stones tore loose the sooty dust and the black clouds seemed to fill the break in the roof. A gust of this struck Ned in the face. Gulping for breath, his feet still wildly seeking niches in the ladder, the boy dodged the flying stones.

One of his toes caught on the corner of a step in the log and, claspig his dish of hardened oil, the partly suffocated boy saw almost the full form of the man fill the hole. He was struggling desperately. At that moment, the man's hands catching finally at the edge of the opening he had made, his fall seemed checked. But Ned threw his free arm about the ladder. He saw what was coming.

Even through the sooty cloud that filled the chamber, the gasping, terror-stricken boy could see the yet standing edge of the broken roof outlined against the gray sky above—it was slowly sinking under the weight upon it. In another instant the entire stone roof vault would collapse. Gritting his teeth and abandoning further effort to find the ladder steps, Ned threw his legs around

the pole and dropped into the black hole beneath.

It was not far—perhaps ten feet. But as the boy's feet struck the hard bottom of the tunnel and the force of the impact hurled him from the ladder, he heard the final crash above. Without attempting to regain his feet, Ned rolled over and over, hugging his lamp to his breast. Where he had struck the bottom of the opening, tons of roof slabs were tumbling after him, and the slender ladder, split and broken, was tangled in the wreckage choking the shaft.

Retained in part by the broken ladder, the shaft well was completely closed. Ned, his face and hands scratched and bleeding, and his clothing torn on the niches of the ladder, lay panting and spitting soot dust just within the tunnel opening leading north. Not a sound came from above.

Scrambling painfully to his knees, the boy sat for some moments to regain his breath. He felt for his revolvers. Both were safe. Then he searched for his matches and breathed a sigh of relief. They were safe. After that, he arose—slowly. He stood clear of the tunnel roof. Finally, he lit a match. Nursing it into a full flame within his shaded hands, he looked about. The flaring match almost fell from his shaking fingers.

Was he in a jeweled cave? Was he in a cham-

ber of gems? Like a mosaic of emeralds, the almost smooth wall before him glittered in facets of brilliancy. As far as the light reached, his blinded eyes saw the same deep shimmer of green.

Turning, he had only time to see the other wall sparkling as if a mirror reflecting the opposite side. Above, the roof was slaty black, and then all was dark again.

The excited boy reached out his hands as if to grasp the iridescent walls of his prison. He understood.

"Old Oomikot's mine," he gasped. "The one real copper lode in all the world. And it 's ours," he almost shouted, "ours!"

With another match, Ned attempted to examine more fully the closed shaft behind him. He had hardly begun when his galloping thoughts recalled the precious lamp. After several efforts, he relit it. When the acrid smoke at last burst into a heavy flame, he put the stone dish on the floor and made a long examination. He was completely shut off from the world above. Not a ray of light came through the roof stones caught in the short shaft.

So completely was the opening closed that Ned could only conclude a section of the roof, falling intact, had arched itself in the shaft. Rather than

perish in the tunnel, he decided he would attempt, in the end, to clear away the tangled fragments. But he recognized the risk in this—the danger of precipitating the entire mass upon himself. For that reason, he determined that his first resource was to explore the crystal encrusted tunnel.

The bruised and bleeding boy had another reason for not making the herculean and hazardous attempt to tear away the roof that made him prisoner: in its present condition, it protected him from some one, unknown to him, who was determined to take his life—some one who had already tried to murder him.

Leaning against the tunnel wall while he recovered his breath and some of his composure, Ned looked at his watch. Then he whistled. As nearly as he could remember, the *White North* had sailed over the south side of the volcano crater at five minutes of two o'clock. It was then sixteen minutes after two. In twenty-one minutes, the airship had landed on the plateau, and adventures and perils had befallen the boy that were enough in number to fill a volume. Beyond his bruises, Ned was safe. But what had become of Alan and Dufour?

Determined to answer that question, he at last caught up his ill-smelling lamp. The already

blackening blood on his hands made him feel his face. A splotch on his temple told him that his fall had been no light one. But the pain of it had been lost in his excitement. Raising the Eskimo lamp above his head, he started forward. A sudden pain shot through his leg. Till that time, he was not conscious of this injury. But there was no time for examination.

Before the blood-smeared, limping lad, the crystalline tunnel stretched. Would it lead to escape or end in black nothing? Closing his jaws, the gritty boy set forth to decide the question.

CHAPTER XXI

SECRET OF THE CRYSTAL TUNNEL

All that Ned had read of the theories of the French savants concerning pre-glacial days in the Arctics, now rushed back to him. Some daring geologists he had read, had gone so far as to declare that the Arctic regions had once been tropic in climate and life. Was this possible? If they had always been ice and snow, how account for the coal on present ice-locked Liakoff? And how explain the coal that the boy could plainly make out in the tunnel roof?

The theory, as Ned recalled it, was that the north pole had once been in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Mexico. When that part of the world became so weighted with unmelting layers of paleocrystic ice as to make it top-heavy, the billions and billions of tons shifted. Then, the wobbling planet came to a new balance and the dislodged ice created new poles. The pre-glacial wastes of Mexico blossomed into tropic verdure, and the rich vegetation and wealth of animal life at the poles were swept away, or covered beneath the new cataclysmic drifts.

Ned could not help smiling as he recalled how Alan had scouted this wild idea when he and Bob first explained it. But was it so ridiculous? If absurd, how were many of the wonders of the Arctic to be accounted for? And, foremost, how else explain the presence of coal and tropic animal bones in regions where now perpetual ice exists?

As Ned examined the tunnel in which he had been made prisoner, he could well imagine that, at one time, all Coronation Bay had been mainland and above water. On it, doubtless, there were both animal and vegetable life. The trees had fallen as in other lands to make coal deposits and, in time, the volcano burst forth in its center. Oomikot Island was the result.

As the great crater arose, the land for miles around fell and the sea rushed in. Even the limited formation exposed to the puzzled boy, suggested this—the top layer of scoria or lava debris, the bituminous deposit, and beneath these, the rock holding the copper veins.

The volcano explained all. Lifting the crust of coal and rock, it had split the ore seams and lodes. Through these rifts, in places, the pent up lava had rushed to find a common outlet in the big crater. In other rifts, the parted granite had been left, as open passages. Into some of these,

the softer coal strata had fallen. Where Ned now found himself, the walls of the broken ledge sparkled as if the fracture had just taken place.

But Ned did not stop to think over all these theories just then. In fact, he was concerned more with getting into daylight than with geology. Two things occurred to him. In underground passages he recalled that labyrinthian routes or the paths of previous travelers are usually indicated by trails of lamp smoke on the tunnel tops. The top of the present passage being coal, no such signs were visible. Then he looked for traces of former travelers on the floor.

Plainly, it was no common thoroughfare. Whatever the purpose of the ladder in the now choked shaft, it could not have been for general use. On the bottom of the passageway, which seemed to be of rock fragments packed in disintegrated coal, there was not a foot print. Nor was there even a spot of hardened walrus blubber to indicate that a lamp bearer had ever passed that way. When Ned's labored breathing became more pronounced, he was conscious that the tunnel was gradually ascending.

The light from the lamp the boy bore reached such a short distance ahead that Ned did not immediately realize the grade was leading upward.

But he did know the fissure was increasing in width and decreasing in height. And, in general, he believed he was traveling northwest or toward the crater rim. That suggested a new calculation.

The ledge or plateau on which the houses were located was perhaps five hundred yards in depth. The largest building—the stone house of the smoke—was about half way back toward the crater wall which rose precipitately at the rear of the plateau. The vaulted apartment through which Ned had entered the tunnel was next to the big house. Therefore, if the imprisoned boy traveled to the west or northwest, two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards would bring him under the walls of the volcano.

When Ned figured this out, he realized that he had not kept track of his progress. Determining to do so, he put his lamp on the tunnel bottom and paced his way carefully back to the beginning. When he reached the lamp again, he found that he had traversed seven hundred feet of tunnel, and must, therefore, be nearly under the volcano sides. With a match, he took his bearings, using his pocket compass, both at the closed shaft and where he had left the lamp. As he suspected, his course had been almost due northwest and straight ahead with a slight grade upward.

Making better note of advance, direction and grade, the boy took up the lamp once more. It was now nearly three o'clock. An hour had passed since he separated from his companions. Concerned as Ned was about them, he also wondered what they were thinking about him. But his plans were made now. He would push forward quickly in his tunnel exploration and if this came to nothing, he would return, and, while his oil lasted, attempt to clear the shaft. As for food and drink—he had not thought of them. He had not eaten since their late breakfast.

From this point, the roof of the tunnel began to lower very markedly.

“All right,” said Ned to himself, with a forced smile. “The quicker I’m shut off, the better it’ll be, I reckon. I would n’t want to spend a day wandering around here and then draw a blank. If it ’s the shaft for me, I want to tackle it while I’ve got a lamp.”

But, stooping now, he pressed on. Finally, just as he found himself forced to his hands and knees, the boy was conscious that the emerald shimmer of the tunnel walls had disappeared. He stopped, on his knees, to make sure of this. He found at once that the walls, which for some distance had been twenty feet or more apart, were now just

distinguishable. They had suddenly widened. In front, they wholly disappeared in impenetrable black.

With an alarmed glance, Ned also discovered that the roof of the tunnel came to an end just beyond him. Two other things confirmed his instant conclusion—the sound of his breathing seemed to roll away into a wide, empty space, and his sputtering lamp flickered in a new, full volume of air. The ore lode had disappeared and through the fissure in the rock, he had reached an unseen cavern.

It was foolish to kneel and speculate on the extent or character of this. The air was wholesome and one glance showed that the bottom—now wholly of rock—was such as to permit an advance. A moment later, the wonder-struck boy was standing, his lamp high above his head. At first, he could make out little. Then, peering far above him, he seemed to catch the glitter of stalactites and other forms hanging from a vaulted roof.

Moving hastily to the west along the side of the cavern, he saw that for perhaps ten feet in height, it was a fractured seam of coal. Above this a domed roof rose. The first sight of the lower curve of this, even in the smoky glare of the stone

lamp, dwarfed into insignificance the emerald sheen of the wonderful tunnel.

Ridges and layers of stalagmites, carbonaceous forms of endless designs, lay upon each rocky protuberance. In greens of countless shades, these fantastic billows rose in iridescent folds until they were lost in the splendors of the vaulted roof. From this, as if placed by the hand of the skilled artist, stalactites hung like fairy candelabra. And each opal-like point, tinged with the filtered green of copper, was tipped as with an emerald gem.

In the blaze of it all, Ned caught his breath. It burst upon him out of nothing like imaginings of fairyland. Before him and behind him, all was black. But within the glare of his crude lamp, a wall of curved iridescence seemed to imprison him within a sphere of glorious green. For some moments, he stood entranced. Then the wonder of it turned to awe, and the boy's hands began to tremble. Bodily danger had not affected him like this marvelous display of nature's infinite resources.

At last, the nervous boy lowered the lamp he had been holding with straining arms high above his head, and, with an effort, withdrew his eyes from the play of colors. He made his way slowly forward. There was no sign of the coal

vein on the bottom of the cavern and no trace of the copper lode. Underfoot were hardened pools of carbonaceous drippings in shell-like layers of soft green, brownish red and white. But on them, was no trace of human footstep.

Advancing, the walls disappeared from sight, and the top of the cavern rose higher and higher. Ned's idea in crossing the cave was to discover, if possible, an outlet. But, suddenly, he stopped. Could he find the low ingress he had just left, in case he had to return? He had not specially marked it, except by the exposed coal vein at its left side. He looked back; the wall and opening were already out of sight.

Again the precariousness of his situation burst on the hesitating boy. Dazed for a few moments by the marvelous cave's beauty, he suddenly put these thoughts to one side, together with concern over his retreat, and determined to go swiftly ahead at any hazard. His only guide was the drift of smoke from his lamp.

Thirty or forty feet he had cautiously advanced over the smooth floor when his heart thumped. He heard, almost in front of him, a hurried, soft sound as of the glide of a moccasined foot. With the chill that swept over him, there was a first impulse to extinguish his light. Then, almost

without reasoning, he placed it hastily on the shining floor and sprang quickly back. When he felt himself beyond the reach of the rays, he stopped for thought.

If Ned's intuition was right, he was not the only living thing in the cavern. The sound certainly came from a breathing object. It was too stealthy to be the movement of an animal. If a human being, who could it be? Whoever it was, the person was evading detection. The object had also retreated into the darkness as had the boy. Each, out of sight of the other, was now in the black circle beyond the lamp's light. Ned, sinking to the floor, drew a revolver and waited, scarcely daring to breathe.

Yet he distinctly heard heavy breathing in the direction of the fallen footstep. How long this continued, he could not estimate. But, suddenly, above it, there was a movement as of a quickly moving body and a low snarl. This, almost curdling the boy's blood, ended abruptly as if a quick hand choked an animal. The cavern was very cold, but a colder perspiration covered Ned's body.

His agonizing suspense was soon over. The suppressed snarl broke out again, deeper and angrier and then, as if a body had been cast aside,

a form leaped into the circle of the light. Its hairs bristling with anger, an immense Eskimo dog flew at the lamp with a savage yelp, its white fangs glistening in the yellow-red glare and its eyes silver-blue in the flame, it haunched itself before the flame.

The tense boy did not hesitate. Almost as the beast threw itself toward the spluttering light, Ned thrust out his arm and fired. His bullet went true. In the pandemonium that followed, the lad sprang to his feet. The roar of the automatic within the hollow chamber rebounded upon his ears like a cannon discharge. And in it, like the line fire of a squad of soldiers, came seemingly endless crashing echoes. At Ned's feet, a splintered mass told of a new escape from death. The explosion of the revolver had dislodged scores of stalactites which came thundering to the floor.

But even in this peril and while he saw the gaunt frame of the spectre-like animal arch its body in one death convulsion, Ned did not fail to hear the mournful cry of a human being. And, amid the roaring clash and shivering splinter of the stalactite on the rocky floor, he saw the feeble figure of a man tumble forward and fall on the body of the dead dog.

Gripping his revolver anew, the boy also sprang

forward. The man clasped the dog in his arms. A piercing cry suddenly came from the recumbent figure. Guided by the half light of the still burning lamp, Ned touched the groveling object. Although clothed in thick furs, the boy felt a worn and emaciated body. It wore no hood, and the thin, gray hair set Ned's heart thumping. It was the hair of a white man.

"Mellum," he whispered, "Joel Mellum!"

The trembling figure did not turn, but its cries ceased.

"Mellum, Joel Mellum," repeated Ned, his voice quaking with the nervous strain. "I 'm a friend—a white boy, look."

Ned drew the bent form toward him until, suddenly relaxing, the old man fell over toward him and sank to the floor, face upwards. The boy dropped on his knee, and with a quick movement, pulled the lamp near the head of the prostrate man.

The eyes that looked up into his seemed those of one in a dream; in them, there was no intelligence; and, from his lips, came no response. The thin figure was almost lost in furs, out of which extended a shrunken head. This seemed, at first sight, as if the bones had been withdrawn and as if the flesh had shriveled.

The hair, thin on top, thickened into a heavy, gray growth of whiskers which fell in one disheveled mass about the man's neck. That part of the face between his hair and whiskers was like wrinkled parchment, smoke and oil begrimed. At sight of Ned, the prostrate man rose to his elbows, and Ned sprang to his feet.

The man, in a thin voice, scarcely audible, muttered something in Eskimo. And then, before Ned could speak, added:

“English?”

“American,” answered Ned, kneeling again.

“Are you Mellum?”

Again the man spoke in savage tongue, and then, with a wail, threw himself sideways on the body of the dead dog.

The boy reached over and caught the man's hand.

“He was your friend. Listen. The dog was your friend. But you have other friends now. Try to think. If you are Mellum, we have come to help you. We've come to buy your mine—to take you away.”

“Mine?” repeated the man slowly. “To take me away?” Then he shook his head.

“Are you Mellum?” pleaded Ned again. “Are you the Englishman, Joel Mellum?”

As if thinking, the shrunken-visaged creature stared a moment, and then closed his eyes.

"Dufour sent us," exclaimed Ned suddenly. "Dufour told us to come."

The man's heavy eyes reopened at once.

"Dufour?" he repeated. "Dufour? And Hayward? They are coming?" he mumbled, raising to his elbows again and peering at Ned. "You're not Dufour," he added. Then he trembled as if a chill had seized him, and his head sank. But almost at once his shoulders straightened.

"Are you Joel Mellum?" besought Ned again. "Mellum who sailed with Franklin? Tell me!"

He had caught the old man's shoulders in his arms.

"Mellum?" repeated the man. Then he moved his grizzled head up and down. "It was my name, long ago. Yes, Mellum!"

As if the strain had been too heavy, the hoary survivor twisted out of Ned's grasp and once more threw himself on the body of the dead dog.

CHAPTER XXII

OOMIKOT'S MINE AT LAST

But the great thing had been accomplished Joel Mellum—the White Eskimo—the sole inhabitant of Oomikot Island and the owner of the fabulous copper lode, had been found. In that much at least, Alaska Lew had been defeated. To retain the Arctic survivor in custody, to discover Alan and Dufour and go to their aid, if necessary, and to finally defeat the scheming Hayes and Tyrrell were Ned's immediate duties.

Undaunted by Mellum's condition, the boy realized that his first work was with the feeble old man. All the resources at his command he brought into instant use. As the grief-stricken guardian of the island grew calmer, Ned cajoled the old man into listening to his story. As if talking to a child, he began it. Moved as he was by the awful silence of the cavern and by the mystery of his situation, the boy made no effort, for a time, to ascertain where he was, or how the old Englishman came to be there.

Whether Mellum knew aught of his friends or

how he was again to reach the world above, the boy did not know. Nor did he attempt to learn these vital things until he had persuaded the prostrate man that human friends had come to take the place of the dead dumb brute. Before he had persuaded the lost Arctic explorer to talk of himself, Ned told his own story—a little at a time that it might be understood.

Gradually the dull wits of Mellum brightened into understanding. But it was only after many minutes of simple talk, and it was like a schoolboy memorizing a lesson. At last, he seemed to grasp it in part.

“And you are willing to sell your mine to Mr. Osborne?” Ned repeated at last after long explanations.

“Dufour was to get two hundred and fifty thousand pounds,” Mellum answered, his eyes growing bright.

“And if Mr. Osborne pays that, you will sell?” persisted Ned.

The old man swayed his body.

“They must have their share,” he answered with what seemed growing caution.

“Mr. Hayward has one thousand dollars already,” repeated the boy. “And Dufour’s grandson is willing. Is that enough?”

"And you 'll take me back to England?"

"I 'll promise," answered Ned with feeling. "And we 'll care for you until you are among your friends again."

"I have no friends. The world has forgotten me."

Ned reached out and took the old man's shriveled hand.

"I 'll be your friend," he said. "We came through the Arctic world to find you. I *am* your friend. There are those outside who are not your friends. Believe in me and trust me. I 'll protect you as I would protect those who sent me here. Will you promise? Will you write your name to your promise?"

"You 've come to save me?" asked the old man again. "You won't let them steal my treasure, the mine I 've guarded and watched all my life?"

"If you trust me," answered the boy.

"*They were after me!*" exclaimed Mellum suddenly as if all thought of the mine had suddenly vanished.

"Who?" exclaimed Ned.

"Who?" repeated the man. Then he added: "They were coming to take it from me. They did n't get me," he concluded in a quavering voice. "And they don't know—I fooled 'em."

Ned grasped his companion's arm and drew him nearer the light.

"Who were after you?" he repeated slowly with no attempt to conceal his agitation.

"Them that came out of the sky?"

"A boy and an Indian?" almost shouted the lad.

"That came in the bird out of the sky," repeated Mellum gasing vacantly into the lamplight.

"Where did they find you?"

The old man almost chuckled.

"I was behind the rocks," he answered at last, "watching the boat come in. I watch always," he explained, "for the boats bring meat and fish. Then the white bird flew toward me out of the sky, and them as wanted to kill me came from it —"

"Yes," interrupted Ned, breathless with excitement. "Then what?"

"I saw 'em," continued Mellum with another sorrowful chuckle, "an' I beat 'em. I got to it first, and then they could n't find me."

Ned sprang to his feet.

"To the house on the hill?" he exclaimed. "Is that how you got in here?"

"They could n't find me then," exclaimed Mellum. "No one knows the way but me."

Ned felt like shouting for joy. His friends were

probably safe. It at least explained why and how they had so suddenly disappeared. Seeing the old man escaping toward the little structure on the side of the crater cliff, Alan and Dufour had hastened in pursuit. When Mellum disappeared in the structure, they followed. Probably, while attempting to find where the fugitive had gone, Ned's encounter with Hayes and his party had taken place.

"Did they follow you?" asked Ned decisively enough now.

Mellum only shook his head.

"Nobody knows the way," he repeated; "not even the Eskimos."

It was plain enough. In the few minutes between Ned's arrival at the house of the smoke and his imprisonment in the vaulted chamber, Alan and Dufour had been debating whether they should follow the man they had chased into what was probably another tunnel. Likely enough, they had decided against this and turned to go to his assistance. It was not impossible that his friends had been spectators of the demolishing of the roof of the vaulted house. But where were they now? At that moment, they might be besieged by Tyrrell and his aides.

"Those who chased you are my friends," said

Ned in a voice that startled his still recumbent companion. "They are your friends. They are in danger. Come," he added in a voice of command. "Take me out."

Mellum seemed to draw back, and the impulsive boy was about to assist him to arise when he hesitated. Dropping on his knee by the lamp once more, Ned unfastened his coat and sweater and thrust his hand into the belt where he had carried unused and almost untouched for nearly four months something over two hundred dollars. He took out five twenty-dollar gold pieces. Remembering the effect of money on the distracted Hayward, he dropped the coins on the hard floor of the cavern, and then placed them in Mellum's hand.

"Sixteen thousand of these will be yours," Ned whispered in the old man's ear.

But, what had turned old Hayward's head seemed to have a contrary effect on Mellum.

"The great Mr. Osborne has that?" he asked with new strength in his voice.

"Ten million dollars—or more," explained the boy hurriedly. "Over two million pounds," he added impressively.

Mellum's eyes lit up with the newly kindled light of his ever present but sleeping avarice. When Ned saw this, he took from another pocket

of the belt the form that Mr. Mellum had prepared and entrusted to him. It was not at all certain that Ned and his friends would find Mellum alive, but the systematic business man had prepared for every contingency.

“Listen,” said Ned, “you will have sixteen thousand pieces like those, if you trust me and the man who sent me. Enough to make you rich, if you believe me.”

Then, the old man leaning forward greedily, Ned slowly read the following:

“I, Joel Mellum, of Oomikot Island, hereby agree to sell, and James W. Osborne, of Boston, Massachusetts, U. S. A., agrees to purchase, at the price of three hundred thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three 33-100 dollars (\$333,333-1-3), all the interest of said Joel Mellum in that land known as Oomikot Island, lying in Coronation Gulf, north of British North America, and approximately in latitude 68 degrees north, and longitude 112 degrees and 30 minutes west. Deeds to be given and money paid within one year from this date.

"Witness the hands and the seals of the said Mellum and the said Osborne this day of August, 19—. "James W. Osborne."

“James W. Osborne.”

Then he laid the paper on the floor by the lamp and inserted the date — August 12. Pointing to the bottom of the paper he said:

“Mr. Osborne has promised to pay you all that without seeing your mine. He has signed already. Hayward will get as much. Dufour will get as much. Sign, and sixteen thousand pieces like those will be yours.”

There was no delay now. Taking the pencil in his bent fingers, Joel Mellum traced like a child — perhaps for the first time in over half a century — the words that had come to mean so little to him but which were now closing the sale of a lone, rock pinnacle in the unchartered Arctic seas for a million dollars.

“Mr. Mellum,” said Ned solemnly, “by that mark you have brought yourself back into the world. You are no longer a savage.”

Slowly the old man rose to his feet. Then as if in response to some new power within him, the bent and fragile form seemed to straighten and stiffen.

“Follow,” he said, at last, in a voice that startled and thrilled the boy, “I understand.”

And then, Mellum caught up the light, and with the sure glide of the Eskimo started forward. After a few minutes' advance, the emerald walls

again came into sight, and the guide turned to the left. That which struck Ned as the strangest was the absence of any sign that a human being had ever traversed the cave. As he followed Mellum, he peered eagerly on all sides for the faintest sign of path or trail, but saw nothing. Nor was there even a bit of wood or rock that might have been fashioned for special use. Plainly enough, this was not where Mellum procured his copper. And it was equally plain that it had not come from the unmarred vein in the tunnel.

While these speculations were muddling the boy's head—for, after all, his chief thought was for Alan and Dufour and his escape—Mellum suddenly turned and said:

“Look out. Don't fall.”

The man was on the edge of a decided downward slope and, picking their way diagonally down the face of this, the two came to a smooth, hard surface; a semi-transparent mass also glinting green in the yellow flare of the lamp.

“Ice,” explained the Englishman.

It was the lowest portion of the cavern where at some distant time, perhaps in some specially hot summer, enough water percolated through the copper-charged cavern roof to form a pool—now solid ice. On the emerald tinged and frosted sur-

face of this, Ned's quick eye saw the first trace of footsteps. They came upon this lightly traced trail at right angles, and then turned to the left or west.

Within a few yards, the flint-like ice ended abruptly against the cavern wall. With a sign to follow him, Ned saw Mellum drop on the ice, put the lamp in front of him and then shove it ahead under a shelf extending about two feet above the frozen pool. As Mellum disappeared beneath the shelf, the boy followed, and a moment later found himself in what might have been a continuation of the tunnel, through which he entered the cave.

For twenty-five feet or more, they crawled forward beneath a gradually ascending roof. For this distance, they were yet on the ice, the tunnel being on a level with the little lake in the cavern. Then, as the rift began to rise, the ice was left below, and in all respects, the tunnel was again a counterpart of the one at the far end of the cave.

As they were able once more to stand erect, Ned could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"Mr. Mellum," he asked, laying his hand on the old man's arm, "where is the mine? Where do you get the copper?"

"On the hill," was Mellum's answer. "Up there."

The tunnel appeared to have only a slight grade upward, but from this Ned understood that it must come out on the high ground above the plateau. He urged his guide forward. Every moment might be precious. After they had advanced about two hundred yards without indication of an outlet, the boy began to realize that the first tunnel and the cavern had led him far into the heart of the crater wall.

Following in the black shadow cast by Mellum's fur encased form, Ned had not looked ahead for some moments, when a sign from his guide brought him to a sudden stop. As the boy bumped against the old man, and cast a quick glance around, he saw that they had reached the end of their journey. From the scintillating shimmer of the crystalline tunnel, they had passed into a widened shaft of lustreless brown.

Ned knew instantly and without a word of explanation, that he was at last in old Oomikot's mine. Not only the solid copper walls of pure metal were before him, but he saw the very tools with which the metal had been torn out to be beaten into knives, spears, dishes and ornaments. He pulled Mellum to one side for a closer look. There could be no mistake. His hand fell on the cold, heavy metal, oxidized, but as pure as if an ingot

from the most perfect refinery. There was only time for a moment's thought of Mr. Osborne and the fabulous wealth about him, and then he sprang forward, no longer waiting for Mellum.

He knew that near by must be the opening the outer world. Impetuously he dashed ahead. The widened shaft was not long and, as it narrowed into the tunnel rift again, the anxious boy checked himself and turned to hurry Mellum forward. Then he realized that the ever moving air of the tunnel had increased to a draft. It must mean that the opening was not far away.

"Come on with the lamp," he called excitedly to the old man. Too anxious to await its arrival, he turned and with outstretched arms, hurried into the black opening. He had gone but a few feet when he stopped suddenly, felt for a match, struck it, and looked at his watch. He gasped in surprise. It was fifteen minutes of five o'clock. As he was about to cast the match aside, he took a quick glance about.

The tunnel continued on ahead, a black shaft, but almost immediately in front of the boy, rose, in the center of the rift, a ladder. Before the match expired, Ned saw that it was exactly similar to the one he had discovered in the vaulted tomb of old Oomikot, and without waiting for light

or Mellum, he ran forward to it. He felt that it led to the little house on the hill, and here he hoped to find his companions. As his feet felt the niches and he began to make his way upward, his ears were strained for some sound. He could hear nothing.

Above him, there was a glimmer of half light—he could even guess that he was emerging into a structure similar to the vaulted chamber where he had met with disaster. Scarcely breathing and cautiously lifting himself—for there were those on the island who were not his friends—his head slowly reached the top of the ladder shaft. The chamber into which he looked was little more than a covering for the mouth of the shaft. Neither Alan nor Dufour were in it.

With a groan of disappointment, Ned drew his body quickly into the apartment. In one corner, were two old rifle barrels, dismounted from their stocks and sharpened and tempered into chisels. Near by were several crude wooden mauls. In another corner was a heap of copper chips and fragments. Between them, on a hearth, sat a metal heating lamp or stove. The wick of moss was smoking. Some one had been there, and recently.

The entrance to this shaft house was a low, skin-covered door on the south side. With but a glance

at the contents of the structure, the distracted Ned, grasping a revolver, dropped on his knees and crawled swiftly into the open air. Eddies of crust-ed snow almost obscured the landscape.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE IN THE SNOW

When Alan and the Indian parted from Ned and raced for the stone house of the smoke, they were surprised to find no door on the seaward side. Hastening around the structure, they were just in time to catch sight of the fleeing form of a man. Without even waiting to examine the interior of the house, they set out to intercept the fugitive.

"It must be old Mellum himself," panted Alan, as he attempted to keep pace with Dufour. The flying man was well up the crater side and long before those in pursuit could even hail him, he disappeared within the little stone house. When Alan reached the side of the shaft covering, Dufour was out of sight.

But the quarter-breed soon reappeared. As soon as Dufour made out the shaft opening, he knew that the man they were pursuing had escaped therein. He sprang after the fugitive but, in the black darkness, followed him only a few yards. When he rejoined Alan, they at once discovered the blubber lamp and, quickly lighting it, both de-

scended the ladder and advanced as far as the widened copper shaft.

But the man they sought had wholly disappeared and even in their excitement over the wealth of metal about them, they decided to rejoin Ned and take general counsel before renewing the search. Returning to the shaft house and depositing the burning lamp on the floor, they crawled out of the house, expecting to be confronted by the puzzled Ned.

Instead, they were appalled at the sight of four strangers. Their companion was nowhere in sight. Just to be made out in the distance, a white man was vigorously attacking the stone roof of one of the small houses. Near him were two Indians. At the door of the other house, south of the big house of the smoke stood a third Indian.

For some moments, Alan and his companion stood speechless. Then Dufour pointed over the brow of the plateau to a black object on the far away shore of the bay.

"They are here," he said.

"Where 's Ned?" was Alan's only reply.

"We 'll find him," exclaimed Dufour, doggedly.

With no further word, the quarter-breed set off down the hill.

Half way down the scoria slope, Alan and Du-

four, watching intently, saw the roof of the low stone house suddenly sink beneath the white man, and heard his cry of alarm, even above the crash of falling rocks. They reached the ruins while two Indians were attempting to rescue the partly entombed man. There were no words until the man, ghastly pale and his face distorted with pain, was lifted from the wreck. He sank upon the frozen ground as if exhausted.

While Dufour addressed himself with quick words to the Indians, Alan faced the injured man.

"You are Mr. Hayes?" he said abruptly.

The man shook his head sneeringly.

"Then you are Tyrrell?"

The injured man looked up.

"I am," he said. "Is it any business of yours?"

"Why did you kick in that roof?"

"For exercise," answered the man, with another sneer.

Before Alan could say more, Dufour grasped his arm and pointed to the collapsed vault.

"Below," he shouted, and in another moment, was on the heap of stones tearing them away with all the energy of his muscular arms. He could only mean that Ned was beneath the rocks.

The chill of horror and anger that swept over Alan made the boy irresponsible. Springing on

the sitting Tyrrell, he threw him flat on the hard ground and then caught the man by the throat. But the anguish wrought face of the injured prospector saved him. Clutching the prostrate man only long enough to see how helpless he was, Alan released him. But, even as he did so, his face white with anger and fright, Alan leaned over the unmoving man, and hissed:

“If he ’s dead, you ’ll pay for it anyway.”

The next instant, he was by the quarter-breed’s side. At that moment, Dufour turned and called to the now motionless Indians in their own tongue. When they hesitated, his revolver flashed in the air. They moved forward, but at a word from the white-faced man on the ground, they hesitated again. Alan saw and understood. Despite the fact that Tyrrell had half risen and had a revolver in his hand, the boy sprang from the ruins.

Tyrrell made a desperate effort to raise his arm, but the exertion was too much. He fell back in a faint. Running his hands over the unconscious man’s person, Alan took from his belt a knife. Withdrawing the revolver from Tyrrell’s clutched hand, he flew again to the task of extricating the supposed mangled body of Ned.

Awed by Dufour’s command—or persuaded by his tribal relation to them—and without the sup-

port of their superior, the two Loucheux Indians were now desperately at work on the fallen building. In a few minutes, the situation was apparent. As the shaft mouth outlined itself, its similarity to the shaft entrance on the hillside was apparent. When this was recognized, both Alan and Dufour found their first relief.

"He had time to escape," suggested Alan nervously, "if there 's a tunnel."

Hardly had the work of removing the jammed rocks in the shaft begun, when the entire mass with a crash fell through into the space beneath. As they spread out in the open tunnel, the removal of a few more roof slabs gave access to the lower passage. Without a pause, Alan dropped into the opening, and Dufour, his usually stolid face plainly showing his concern, crouched over the shaft to await the result of his investigation.

Three or four minutes passed, when there was a muffled shout.

"All right, Leon, he escaped. There are matches here. Good bye."

The cautious Indian sank over the opening and called:

"Not now. Come back."

When he had pulled the protesting Alan back into the shaft, he added:

“They ’re gone. We can’t follow Ned now. We must protect the opening.”

It was true. Both Tyrrell and his Indians had disappeared. The situation was not reassuring. It was the first opportunity Dufour had found to tell what had happened. The Indians had told him all—the attack on Ned and how he had wounded Alaska Lew. There was no question but that it was to be a fight to the end. For both to enter the tunnel in an effort to rescue their companion, would leave the mouth of the shaft in the enemy’s control. For either one to go left the other as one to five.

Debate did not seem to bring about a ready solution of the dilemma. The Indians had told where the wounded Hayes had been carried, and as these were now to be seen about the furthest cabin from time to time, it was assumed that the injured Tyrrell had also stolen to that refuge. Neither Alan nor Dufour had eaten since morning, and, the sun now being on the horizon, it was biting cold. But these things were the least of their troubles. The big house was open to them, but once inside it, they might be besieged.

Undetermined as to their course, Alan and Dufour patrolled in silence the immediate vicinity of the wrecked vault. It grew colder each moment,

and at last, despite the fact that it was mid-August, the red sun faded into a dull magenta, the keen wind sweeping up from the sea pushed a murky fog before it, and about four o'clock, a heavy snowstorm broke on the island. It was not safe to seek shelter. As the distant building in which their enemies had safe shelter grew dim in the thick cloud of snow, Alan and Dufour could only increase their vigilance. With arms folded, each of the watchers moving slowly back and forth, was soon a white encrusted figure.

By half past four o'clock, the pale, foggy sun, was dipping beneath the horizon like a dull disc of reddish brass, and the swirling snow had blotted out all but the nearer outlines of the Arctic island. The top of the crater was now lost in the clouds, and the white plateau and slope disappeared in a gray wall shutting out the sea. An idea had been growing in Alan's mind—why not take the risk and enter the tunnel in quest of Ned?

Leaning against the snow-covered ruins, he was trying to formulate this into a suggestion when Dufour softly touched his arm.

"They are coming," he said sharply.

Just discernible through the fluttering curtain of snow, Alan could make out shadowy forms slowly emerging from the refuge of the enemy.

Altogether, five persons made their way from the rough cabin, one of them laboriously supported by two Indians.

"It 's Hayes," explained Alan; "and he 's half carried by two of the Indians. Tyrrell 's in front. Looks as if they had decided to settle it." He looked at Dufour inquiringly. "Why not go down there?" he asked, pointing into the shaft and the tunnel beneath. "Let 'em shut us in. That 's a better chance than waitin' here, two to five to be shot at."

But Dufour shook his head.

"We don't have to fight the Indians," he said significantly. "If the white men get hurt, it 's all over."

"They are both wounded now," exclaimed the boy. "I guess we 'll stick. I 'm not afraid, but I don't like fighting."

Dufour only smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and led the boy to the rear of the snow-encrusted walls.

"Get your cartridges ready," was his only comment. "And remember neither of those white men objects to fighting."

The moment Dufour left the boy to take station at the heap of rock and snow, a strange feeling came over Alan—a sort of desperate despair. In spite of the approaching figures, the sombre, soli-

tude of the silent Arctic world suddenly intensified. Ned's disappearance seemed to weaken both his physical and his moral courage. The enforced delay in an attempt to go to his chum's rescue hurt him like a wound. As he thought of how Hayes had shot at Ned and as he recalled Tyrrell's cowardly attack, he began to forget his fear of an encounter with the two men.

"Leon," he called, suddenly as he drew off his gloves and chafed his benumbed hands, "don't let 'em come nearer than the corner of the big house. I 'll halt 'em. If they don't stop, you take the white man in the rear, I 'll take the one in front."

Just as he finished his instructions, there was a puff of smoke, the crack of a revolver and the full smash of a bullet somewhere under the snow. It came from the man in front who, it could now be plainly seen, was Tyrrell. As if for no other purpose than to attract attention, the entire party came to a halt, and then, as rapidly as the other white man could be carried forward, it broke abruptly to the left and hurried forward through the drifting snow to the crater cliff at the rear of the plateau.

While Alan watched the rapidly moving men, open mouthed with astonishment and his drawn

revolver in his hand, Dufour stepped to his side. Together the two stood for a few moments without speaking. Then Dufour pointed to the shaft house, a crystal heap of snow on the crater slope.

"Miners," he said at last, "they can't wait. They know. Maybe from the Eskimos. They are going to look for the mine."

Alan whirled toward his companion.

"And if they get there," he almost shouted, "they 've got the mine and they 'll find Mellum. They 'll never leave either. We 're beaten."

The Indian sprang forward.

"It 's all in the open," he exclaimed sharply. "Come on. The fight has n't begun yet."

Knowing that it meant a race for the shaft house and an open battle in the snow, with one last look of anxiety at the opening where Ned had disappeared, Alan broke into a run in the Indian's wake. At the same time, he saw that their action had been anticipated. Alaska Lew's men were spreading out across the slope. Even the wounded Hayes now hobbled on unassisted, and the five men had turned, facing the oncomers in open line of battle.

Dufour slackened his pace. When Alan reached his side, the Indian was shaking his head. Another unprovoked shot from Tyrrell was a second

warning of what might be expected if they forced the issue. Without consulting his companion, Alan responded with his own weapon. Dufour exclaimed:

“No use. We can’t save the mine by getting shot. And we can’t help him,” he added, jerking his head toward the wrecked vault. “Besides, they have no food.”

“But they ’ll have the mine and Mellum,” persisted Alan his heart beating angrily, and his eyes following every movement of the fast retreating line.

But the Indian was obdurate. With a firm grip on Alan’s arm, he restrained the boy from foolishly jeopardizing his life. At the same time, the quarter-breed could think of no word of consolation or encouragement. The careful Indian fully realized that their preliminary victory had already resulted in complete defeat. Mellum had escaped them, Ned was missing and probably in peril of his life, and their rivals were about to take possession of the treasure they thought was theirs.

As the retreating line, with Hayes and Tyrrell guarding the two ends, drew near the shaft house, its members came together. Dufour and Alan

slowly followed, despairing and dispirited, and just out of dangerous range. At last, the enemy was but a small arc, five snow-laden men converging on the little structure that meant so much to their leaders and the two other figures creeping upward on the slope beneath.

As the spread-out line grew into a knot, the two pursuers quickened their pace somewhat.

"Shall we go on?" began Alan.

The question was prompted by the sight of Tyrrell throwing his arm about the now staggering Hayes as if to lift him over the last few feet of the approach to the house.

Before Dufour could answer, two human forms sprang from behind the square stone pile. Even through the half blinding squall of snow, one of these could be seen with his arms high above his head. There was a rasping cry, half fear and half rage, and then the man with the extended arms sprang forward down the slope.

Alan and Dufour had halted in paralyzing amazement. Before they could speak or move again, two pistol shots sounded almost together. The man lunging down the hill tumbled forward in the snow, and Alaska Lew collapsed in the arms of Tyrrell. As his human burden slipped from his arms, Tyrrell dropped to his knee and discharged

his revolver at the other figure above him. The shot brought an instant reply, and a Loucheux Indian by Tyrrell's side whirled backward and pitched down the incline.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNWRITTEN STORY

"It 's Ned," shouted Alan. Danger no longer counted. Almost above the prostrate body of Alaska Lew, a moment later, Ned and Alan threw themselves into each other's arms. Explanations were not necessary. The two uninjured Indians were busy over their fallen companion. Tyrrell, his face even more ghastly with pain, was on his knee at Hayes' side. Dufour was low over the collapsed Mellum.

"I found him," exclaimed Ned, clasping his chum's hand. "It 's old Mellum himself. I found him way down there in a cave. And he 's signed the paper. The mine is Mr. Osborne's."

The two boys were already hastening to Mellum's side.

"And I reckon he 's saved us any more trouble from Alaska Lew," added Alan soberly.

Dufour looked up reassuringly.

"If he dies, it 'll be on account of his age," whispered the Indian. "It 's only a scalp wound."

Ned and Alan hurried on to where Tyrrell was just rising from Hayes' unmoving form. The hardened prospector still had his revolver in his hand. With one quick glance, his tense arm dropped to his side.

"He 's dead," were Tyrrell's hard words. "I reckon the Indian is all in, too." As he spoke, with the motion of a man who made quick decisions, he thrust his revolver into its scabbard and folded his arms. "I surrender," he added. "What 's the verdict?"

Ned stepped to Tyrrell's side and, his own revolver covering the unflinching but defeated man, he took Tyrrell's weapon from its case. Then he nodded toward the Indians. Tyrrell understod, and addressed them in their own tongue. Alan relieved the two savages of their revolvers, and then took a third weapon from the clenched hand of the man in the snow. The touch of this Indian's flesh was enough. As Alan returned Ned's inquiring gaze and nodded his head, Ned knew that two lives had gone out on the brink of old Oomikot's mine.

Mellum's bleeding wound having been staunchd by Dufour, the quarter-breed and the Airship Boys were at last able to take council. Tyrrell and the Indians straightened the forms of their

dead comrades and when their victors turned to give the desperate looking prospector the "verdict," Tyrrell and the two Loucheux were standing in silence, their arms folded, and their backs to the driving snow.

"Everything you have done, Tyrrell," Ned began, "since you reached this island indicates that you are a bad man. I don't need to tell you that you have lost out at every point. We 're sorry that Mr. Hayes and the Indian are dead—that 's more than you would have been had the fight turned against us. But we 're not going to drive you to sea again. Have you food in your boat?"

The square jawed prospector moved his head indicating that he had.

"Until we come to some other decision," went on Ned, "you will be a prisoner in the house you selected. Your provisions will be brought to you from your boat. The conditions are that you will go not more than twenty feet from the house without permission."

"And my men?" remarked Tyrrell, coldly.

"Are no longer your men. They will be separated from you. They will have the choice of entering our service or be forced to return to the mainland."

Tyrrell shrugged his shoulders.

"How long will this continue?" he asked, doggedly.

"That is our affairs," answered Ned curtly.

It was now five o'clock—just twenty-four hours since the *White-North* sailed from Herschel Island. Ned, Alan and Dufour were elated with the excitement of the swift change of fortune, and there was a world of things to be talked over, explained and done. But the first work was the care of the dead. The boys were weak from exhaustion, and the freezing gale enfolded the entire group in a blizzard-like grasp. But, with the help of Tyrrell and the Indians, the two dead men were temporarily removed to the shaft house. The skin door was made fast with rocks, and then victors and vanquished set out down the slope.

Ned was the only one aside from Mellum himself who had seen the interior of the big stone cabin. Tyrrell was directed to the low stone structure where the wounded Hayes had been carried, and his two Indians were given the privilege of making a trip down to the beach to secure his food supply. Ned could hardly repress a smile when he saw the impression the interior of Mellum's home made on Alan. The unsavory place was certainly revolting.

"Mr. Mellum," said Ned, after the party had

entered the black, foul smelling stone room, "I suppose the house goes with the island."

The old man, his head swathed in a section of Dufour's shirt, seemed unable to comprehend the question.

"We can live with you, can't we?" went on the boy, while Alan and the Indian were trying to make out the contents of the place.

The Arctic outcast nodded his head slowly.

"Then, we'll begin by making a fire and cleaning house," promptly responded Ned. In a few moments, under Mellum's directions, the smouldering lamp on the hearth had been refilled with blubber and was blazing sufficiently to illuminate the dark interior. It was certainly an unprepossessing place, but the strangers made the best of the old survivor's unkempt home. When a store of dry driftwood was found in one corner, the sputtering oil lamp was removed and a real fire made on the crude hearth.

Every one was in a glow within a few minutes. Without asking further consent, Ned punched out the skin windows and by lifting the door curtain, a volume of fresh cold air made the cabin somewhat more habitable. By six o'clock, flour, pork, tea and the simple mess kit had been brought from

the stranded *White North* and Dufour began preparing a meal.

When this was under way, Ned and Alan set out to examine Tyrrell's cabin. The wind had now fallen considerably, and the snow was lessening with it. But the few hours' storm had turned the plateau and crater into a mountain of sifting flakes. The sun was now well behind the crater, and despite the snow, the cabin they were approaching sat in unshadowed gloom. Neither light nor smoke came from it.

Within fifty feet of the unprotected opening in the front of the little building, the two boys came on the half obliterated footsteps made by Tyrrell in his descent from the battle ground on the slope. Just in front of the cabin, their eyes fell on a fresher trail leaving the structure and heading immediately east on the plateau. Ned, who had been in advance, turned and pointed to the fresh trail.

"He 's come out," exclaimed Alan.

The blaze of one match in the wind swept, barren stone shed confirmed this.

"I wondered if he would," said Ned. There was almost a tone of relief in his words.

"If he 'd what?" asked Alan. Then he sprang to the door and peered out into the darkness along the disappearing trail on the fresh, heavy snow.

"I understand," he exclaimed; "those Indians never came back. Tyrrell has ducked. They 're hidin' in the rocks."

"They are not," said Ned—and now he sighed with actual relief. "Tyrrell stopped the Indians somewhere as they were returning. At this minute, the three men are sailing right around that point," and he motioned toward the south-east corner of the island, "headed for Lob Stick Creek and, I reckon, the Coppermine River."

At nine o'clock that night, moved to new exertion by a supper of pancakes, fried pork and tea, the four occupants of Mellum's stone igloo, emerged into the darkness and disappeared in single file, led by Mellum, down the winding, craggy trail—deep with snow—to the beach below. Ned carried the aeroplane electric flash light. At the foot of the mass of dislodged granite and scoria, the ever prying lamp confirmed Ned's theory.

Here one descending trail of foot-prints met two ascending trails. All three then blended in a return line advancing to the sea. A deep groove in the snow, high on the beach above the wash of the swell, told where the Coppermine River sail boat had been hastily and recently launched. On the black bosom of the Arctic, there was no sign of it.

If Randolph Tyrrell, the associate of the dead Alaska Lew, ever reached the mainland, those who now come and go on the Coppermine, the great waterway of the Barren Lands, have yet to find confirmation of his escape from Oomikot Island. And to this day, Leon Dufour, the quarter-breed, ever inquiring among the Loucheux, yet seeks in vain for some word of the Indians who cast lots with the desperate man.

This last expedition to confirm Tyrrell's flight was all that was necessary to deaden any squeamishness on the part of Ned and Alan as to sleeping in Mellum's oppressive hut. At eleven o'clock, the last arc of the sun had passed into the short, four-hour Arctic night of dead black, and curled together on the white skin of a polar bear, the two boys were far in a dreamless land.

When they awoke at eight o'clock the next morning, Dufour and the old man had been long astir. The storm had ceased and the snow-capped island was aglow with the sparkle of an unfogged sun.

Dufour's breakfast of stewed jerked venison and baking powder biscuits was not half appreciated by the newly active and anxious boys. They were off at once to the brink of the plateau, where the *White North* hung. Pending Dufour's arrival, the clinging snow was removed and then all hands

—even including the slow witted and aged Mellum—lifted the aeroplane to a place of safety. The enshafts and bearings were dried and greased, and then the boys hastened to other duties.

The biting wind of the day before had died. Before noon, the melting snow was running down the crater sides in a thousand rivulets. Until noon work was pushed in an attempt to clean up Mellum's home. Everything movable was carried out of doors—skin bags of blubber, frozen and dried fish; strips of smoked deer and caribou flesh; walrus tusks, furs, skins, clothing and old and new sleeping bags; sleighs, dog harness and, in endless forms and number, stone and copper dishes, eating utensils and weapons of the chase.

Nearly all the food and other articles were carried to Tyrrell's abandoned hut, and then, scraping the grease caked floor as well as they could, cold biscuits and tea were eaten and the solemn ceremony of the day was undertaken. With Mellum's crude mining implements, Alan and Ned excavated a grave in the hard lava at the foot of the shaft house slope. Therein, L. E. Hayes and the unknown Loucheux were buried without ritual, but with sincere grief filling the breast of each speechless boy.

Before Ned and Alan left Oomikot Island, a

slab of lava had been reared at the head of the lonely grave. In a recess of the slab a heavy piece of native copper had been inserted and pounded smooth. In its face, cut with tools from the *White North*, were these words: "L. E. Hayes, and an unknown Loucheux." There the tomb may be seen to-day—the mute reminder of the sorrowful end of a strong man.

Free at last, the boys could restrain themselves no longer. With the almost distracted Franklin survivor as guide, the entire party now hurried to the shaft house on the great expedition to the wonderful cavern. About one o'clock, they dropped into the tunnel and hurried to the magnet that had drawn them into the land of snow and ice—the unbelievable mine of pure copper. For an hour, they reveled in the sight of the unique lode—unmatched elsewhere in all the world.

With the flash light, they peered into each angle and recess and at last built a fire of the drift-wood remnants. As the brilliant glare fell on the deep green oxidized mass, they shouted and danced in exuberance of joy. Not satisfied with that, they even returned to the shaft house and procured Mellum's simple tools. With these, each boy in turn chipped out a slab of metal.

At last satiated with joy, exploration was re-

sumed. It was six o'clock when the weary wanderers climbed laboriously up the shaft of the ruined vaulted house on the plateau.

Sinking on the wall with a sigh of content, Alan exclaimed:

"There 's only one think lacking. I wish Ebeling could have seen what we 've seen this afternoon."

"How about it, Leon? added Ned, turning to Dufour. "Are you satisfied?"

"For Mr. Osborne, for Mr. Hayward, for Mr. Ebeling—" then he paused — "for you and for him," he added suddenly placing his hand on old Mellum's arm, "I am glad. For myself—" and he shook his head—"I am an Indian. The wilderness is my home—money is nothing."

Ned looked at him a moment, and then laughing, rose and threw his arm about him.

"I reckon you think so. But you 're wrong. You are goin' to have three hundred thousand dollars, and more, out of this deal, and you 're goin' back to the United States with us to get it."

"My money is Ebeling's," replied Dufour slowly. "What he says, I will do. He buried my grandfather and he bought me food. My money is his."

Within another twenty-four hours, life on the

island had settled into a routine. Like a child at school, simple-minded old Mellum began to grow brighter. In his intercourse with white men, his long dormant European tastes began to show themselves again. Even in the rearrangement of his long abandoned house, he finally took both interest and pride. Two or three days of a white man's food seemed to strengthen him wonderfully. For hours, the boys alternated in explaining to the old man what had happened in the world since Hayward and the elder Dufour had visited him fifteen years before.

When old Mellum's brain had at last been whetted enough to prompt him to talk, the two boys and Dufour would lie before the fire (they were already using coal) and drink in the pieced-out stories of his long Arctic life. His tale of the disaster that had come to the great expedition on which he had sailed, the details of the abandonment of the ships and the fight for life in Boothia Land is yet an unwritten story. Nor has any one yet told how the exhausted, worn out brain of old Joel Mellum was fertilized again into activity, nor how a civilized white man, almost reverted to a savage in sixty years of isolated brooding, was gradually led back to the world he had lost.

Neither Ned Napier nor Alan Hope, both busy

with mechanical and engineering dreams, had time to attempt that history of the Arctic outcast; but Bob Russell, indefatigable in his search for the unusual in life, has heard Mellum's story from boyhood until he was rescued by the Airship Boys.

"And some day," says Bob frequently, "I 'm goin' to tell it in the greatest story of privation and suffering ever written—'Alone in the Arctic.' "

CHAPTER XXV

AN AIRSHIP WITHOUT WINGS

Although the boys several times ascended to the very summit of the crater above the shaft house, the northern side of the volcano shell shut off a view of the distant Arctic Ocean. Twice the island was circumnavigated completely and twice the ice laden depths of the dead volcano were explored from end to end. Still, the *Aleutian* did not appear.

Two days' work were yet to be done on the broken shaft when the *White North* sailed. By the chart, it was 1335 miles from Herschel Island by way of Cape Bathurst and Dolphin and Union Strait to the approximate location of Oomikot Island. At ten knots an hour, that meant four and one-half days' steaming. It was already August twenty-second. Snow had fallen several times, it was daily growing colder, and the nights were perceptibly longer.

In the evening of August twenty-first, the last flour was consumed. There was no danger of starvation, but the prospect of falling back on

Mellum's native provisions was not inviting. But this was not necessary. About five o'clock the next morning, Dufour aroused the sleeping boys, and pointed through the open window toward the wide bay far beneath. About three miles off shore, the thick black smoke of a steamer was drifting low on the morning breeze. The *Aleutian* had arrived.

The events of that day filled many pages in Bob Russell's note book. Even the staid Mr. Osborne made no attempt to restrain his enthusiasm over the revelations awaiting him. But even the wonder of the great copper lode was not more impressive than the meeting between Joel Mellum and Factor Hayward. The latter, much improved mentally, had been brought as a guest on the voyage when Mr. Osborne and Captain McKay decided that the season was now too far advanced to attempt the Northwest Passage. Ebeling, who was also aboard, had in the six days' voyage, calmed the almost demented factor into a state of reason.

Major Honeywell and Colonel Oje came ashore on the first launch trip. The military man took possession of Mellum and Hayward, and hastened, at once, not to the fabulous mine, but to Mellum's stone house to hear at first hand the weird story of the castaway's lonesome life. He had at last come

into possession of the White Eskimo's secret. Colonel Oje was as eager for news of the Barren Lands over which the boys and the Indian had sailed in the *White North*.

The meeting between Ned and Alan and Bob Russell and between Dufour and the young Englishman partook of the nature of a football rush. But by three o'clock, the excitement of the reunion, the interviews and the inspection of the mine and the emerald cavern and crystalline tunnel had subsided sufficiently to permit a conference. This took place on the *Aleutian*, to which every one was transported in the *Turark*.

Both Mr. Hayward and Dufour signed bills of sale to Mr. Osborne similar to the one made by Joel Mellum. Then came the quick unfolding of plans. With the signing of the sale agreements, the great Oomikot copper mine came into possession of Messrs. Osborne, Oje, Honeywell and others. The real value of the lode might run into many times its cost. The purchasers had decided to take no risks.

"I have n't had my hunt yet," explained Colonel Oje, "and I don't mean to leave this region until I get a musk ox. This is a fine camp—houses, coal, and the *Aleutian* can spare me ample provisions for a year. The steamer will be back next

summer with men, tools and mining equipment. Until then, I 'm going to stand guard over Oomikot Island."

In the murmur of excitement that followed this, a snappy voice spoke up:

"Can't the *Aleutian* spare provisions for two?" asked the smiling Bob Russell. "You know I 'm assigned to you, Colonel Oje."

The big game shooter slapped the boy on the back.

"You 're not goin' to leave us?" exclaimed Alan in half protest.

"You 're leavin' us," answered Bob, laughing.

"Yes, I 'm goin' to stick. Why not? I 've got a lot of films I 've not used. Only, " and he looked at Mr. Osborne appealingly, "I hope you 'll leave us the *Belle of Beaufort*."

"Pick out anything on the steamer, and welcome," was the capitalist's answer. "Take the launch, too."

"And the *White North*?" added Bob, glancing at the two boys.

"Certainly," said Ned. "If you 're bound to stay, take it and welcome. It may be useful."

As Colonel Oje had suggested, it had been agreed that the *Aleutian* would return in the following July with supplies, the outfit for develop-

ing the Oomikot and the money to pay Hayward and Dufour. The steamer was to sail at once in a race to get through Bering Strait before the ice closed in. The effort to find a Northwest Passage by way of Melville Sound, Fox Sound and Hudson Straits was abandoned, partly because of the late season and partly for other reasons.

Joel Mellum was to return to England by way of the States on the *Aleutian*. Mr. Hayward, still in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, could not leave his post permanently until relieved. Nor could Ebeling. As a member of the Northwest Mounted Police, he was proud of his work and—tempting as was the opportunity presented—he announced his intention to return to his station where he would resume his semi-military duties until formally relieved. He and Hayward were to be put ashore again at Herschel Island with clothing, food and many articles that would contribute to their comfort during the coming winter.

At Colonel Oje's earnest request, Dufour, the quarter-breed, consented to pass the winter with the westerner and the young reporter on the island, and to act as guide in the winter hunts. With their work done and no reason for remaining on Arctic land, Ned and Alan were to return home with Mr. Osborne and Major Honeywell.

Bob attempted to induce the Airship Boys to promise to return on the next summer's boat. But they shook their heads.

"It would be fine," answered Ned, "but we are planning to go to school—a technical college. This sort of life is thrilling, but we have other ambitions."

"What kind of an airship is it now?" asked Bob smiling.

"What kind?" repeated Ned, his face sobering. "I suppose you've seen a rocket climb up into the sky, and then dart about until its power dies and it tumbles back to the ground."

"And you are goin' to turn a rocket into an airship?"

"Precisely—an airship without wings or propellers; a flying machine that will make the present day aeroplanes look like kindergarten work, a vehicle of the air that apparently defies gravitation and annihilates space."

"Then what?" exclaimed Bob, already half sorry that he was to remain in the Arctic wastes.

Alan leaned forward, chuckled and whispered:

"The Airship Boys in Finance, or the Flight of the Flying Cow."

Until three o'clock the next day, the swift little *Turark* made continuous trips between the steamer and the shore. The *Belle of Beaufort*,

which had been towed from Herschel Island was to be taken across the gulf to the mainland and left in the protected waters of Lob Stick Creek. Therefore, all stores being landed, Colonel Oje, Bob and Dufour boarded the *Aleutian* to accompany the party that far on the return voyage. About six o'clock, the launch piloted the *Belle* into her winter berth, and then final farewells were said. The saucy little launch turned back toward Oomikot Island, and the now almost black iron steamer, with a hoarse bellow of her siren, swung eastward on the long voyage to the Golden Gate.

In five days, she was again in Pauline Cove, at Herschel Island, but for a few hours only. As Ebeling said "Good bye," the boys wrung his hand.

"Ebeling," said Alan, "by next summer, you will have been relieved from duty. The *Aleutian* will be back again, and you and Leon will have your money. What are you going to do then?"

The cheerful young Englishman smiled.

"That 's all arranged already," he answered. "Leon knows the wilderness as well as any man in America. He and I have promised Mr. Osborne to show his engineers where to run a railroad across the Barren Lands."

"In that case, I suppose we 'll never see you

again," said Ned, with a little quaver in his voice.

Ebeling's smile broke into a laugh.

"My friends," he chuckled, slapping each boy on the shoulder, "'never' is a long time. I 'm sure we 'll meet again. Why," and his eyes snapped with enthusiasm, "before any of us are middle aged, they 'll be running sleeping cars north of the Arctic Circle. If I don't see you before that time, I 'll be watching for you on the first train that comes north over the Hudson Bay, Barren Lands and Coppermine Railway."

The next morning, the *Aleutian* plowing steadily through the icy blue waters of Beaufort Sea on her way back to civilization, Ned and Alan were summoned to Mr. Osborne's stateroom. Major Honeywell was present. Cigar smoke and loose papers on the table indicated that, in the two hours since breakfast, the men had been in conference.

"Young gentlemen," began Mr. Osborne at once, "I want to take this early opportunity to say that I feel grateful to both of you for your valuable services on this expedition."

"Please don't say any more," exclaimed Ned promptly.

"I shan't," answered the dignified capitalist. "At least not on that line. At Major Honeywell's suggestion, you were employed to accompany the

Aleutian. No arrangement was ever made as to the amount of compensation."

"Pay?" blurted out Alan. "We 've been paid over and over for anything we 've done."

But Mr. Osborne stopped him by holding up his hand in protest.

"You saved the *Aleutian* from complete loss, and you found the mine we have just purchased. It is not a question of wages. It is now a matter of what proportion of the Oomikot copper lode is yours."

The boys almost gasped.

"Don't be alarmed," added Mr. Osborne, at once. "It is all a matter of business. We are not going to do anything foolish. The situation is this. The mine will cost us a cash outlay of one million dollars. It looks as if it is cheap at that; but an enormous outlay of money must follow the purchase. Even then a railway must be financed and built. The stock in each company may be non-productive for many years. I left a note with your friend, Mr. Russell, notifying him that he might expect fifteen thousand dollars on the *Aleutian* next summer."

"Fifteen thousand dollars?" repeated the two boys together.

"A winter in Oomikot Island is not exactly life

at a pleasure resort," explained Major Honeywell. "If everything goes all right, he may expect a little stock in the Oomikot Island Copper Company."

"For yourselves," added Mr. Osborne drawing luxuriously on his cigar, "at any time you like, I will be glad to draw my check to each of you for twenty-five thousand dollars."

The two boys sprang to their feet.

"In addition to which," went on the cold man of business, "as soon as the new company is organized and the directors can act, Major Honeywell and I will undertake to see that you are allotted enough stock to keep you interested in the fortunes of the Oomikot."

Protests were of no avail, and gratitude was waved aside. A few minutes later, two red-faced boys, aglow with pride and happiness, despite the keen Arctic wind, hung over the stern rail of the steamer.

"Ned," said Alan, at last, "have you ever figured out just what we 're worth?"

"It won't be much under one hundred thousand dollars apiece when that ivory treasure is sold and countin' this mine money. Why?"

"Nothin', much. Only it makes me sore to

think that, with all that money, I have n't got my silver fox skins for Mary, after all."

Ned's face turned an even deeper red.

"Don't worry," answered Ned, smiling. "I remembered she wanted them. I've got four."

"Four?" exclaimed Alan. "Where'd you get four silver fox skins worth two thousand dollars apiece?"

"Where you dropped 'em," laughed Ned. "Where you threw 'em out of old Joel Mellum's smelly house. You did n't seem to care for 'em, but I thought Mary might."

There was one day's delay off Point Barrow, caused by a drift of new ice, and another pause of two days at the Diomed Islands to clean the flues. After that, the whirring screw of the black funneled steamer did not pause again until Unalaska was reached. On the twenty-fourth day of September, at ten o'clock in the morning the strident siren of the heaving *Aleutian* floated in upon the waiting pilots at the Golden Gate—five months, almost to a day, from the time she steamed away from San Francisco.

The two boys, once more in shore clothes, and reveling in the warm autumn sunshine, were leaning on the bridge rail eagerly drinking in each rising bit of the welcome shore line. As the

Aleutian changed her course to round the bobbing channel stakes and then—for the first time in eight days—slowed down to half speed, the white walls of the Fort Point fortifications broke into sight beyond the Gate. Over the white of the fort, stood out in the breeze of the bay, the fluttering Stars and Stripes.

“Home again!” exclaimed Alan. Then, turning joyously toward his chum, he added: “What ’s the first thing you ’re goin’ to do after we dock?”

“I think,” answered Ned, with a twinkle in his eyes, “that I ’ll telegraph to my mother in Chicago to go over and tell your sister Mary that you ’ve brought her the silver fox skins.”

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